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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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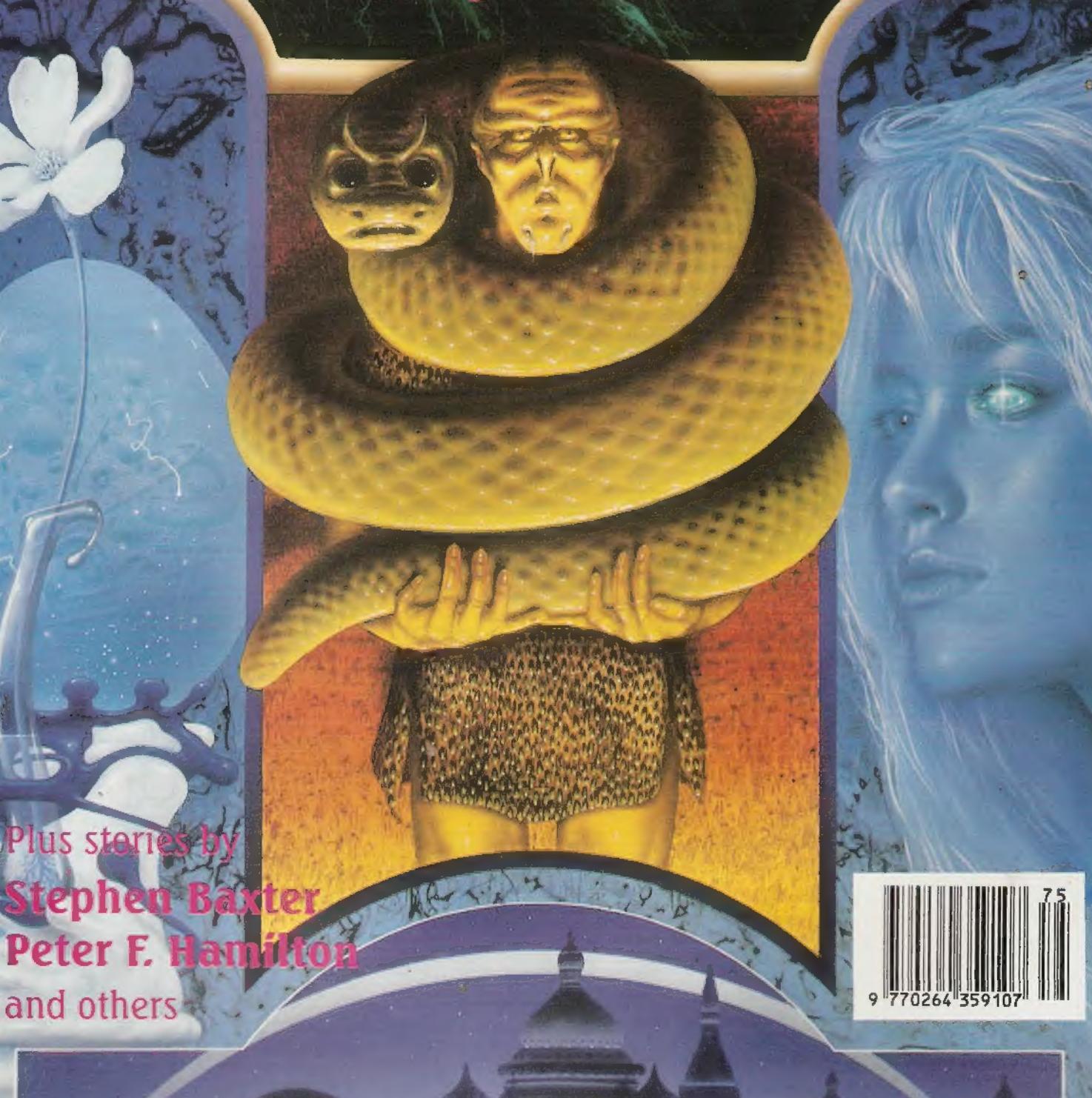
MILLION

THE MAGAZINE ABOUT POPULAR FICTION

September
1993

Ian Watson

interview and story from his new novel
'Lucky's Harvest'



Plus stories by

Stephen Baxter

Peter F. Hamilton

and others



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interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 75

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**Cover by Jim Burns for Ian Watson's Lucky Harvest
(courtesy of Victor Gollancz)**

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Interface

David Pringle

Who are Interzone's overseas subscribers? Although there aren't a great many readers in countries outside the UK, we thought that you might like to know the spread and relative proportions of the magazine's subscribers around the world. At the time of mailing of issue 73 in June 1993, the breakdown was as follows:

USA - 191
Germany - 28
Australia - 24
Japan - 21
Netherlands - 20
France - 17
Belgium - 10
Norway - 10
Spain - 10
Sweden - 10
Ireland - 9
Canada - 8
Austria - 8
Italy - 8
Finland - 7
Switzerland - 7
Czechoslovakia - 5
Hong Kong - 5
India - 5
South Africa - 5
Denmark - 4
Luxembourg - 4
New Zealand - 4
Argentina - 3
Cyprus - 3
Malta - 3
Oman - 3
Portugal - 3
Thailand - 3

We also have two subscribers each in Chile, Gibraltar, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Ukraine – and singletons in such countries as Antigua, Barbados, Botswana, Fiji, Gambia, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mauritius, Netherlands Antilles, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, Turkey and Zimbabwe. (None at all in China, I'm afraid – or Brazil or Mexico or a number of other populous places.)

I'll refrain from further comment, except to say "thanks" to all our American, German, Australian, Japanese and Dutch friends, and to remark: don't the Canadians make a poor showing compared to, say, the Australians? After all, most of them speak English and their population is about ten millions bigger – so what's become of you, Canada?

It's Not "MILLIZONE," it's INTERZILLION

In fact the above figures are underestimates of the current situation, because issues 74 and 75 are also being mailed to all the ongoing overseas subscribers to *MILLION* magazine – among whom Americans also predominate, of course, although there's a surprisingly large contingent of Swedes. As I explained last issue (with apologies), *MILLION* has now merged permanently with *Interzone* because it was impossible to sustain the smaller magazine as a separate entity. I do deeply regret this.

When we last ran *Interzone* and *MILLION* together for one issue only (IZ 51/MILLION 5, September 1991) several *IZ* letter-writers complained that they were being short-changed, one accused of us pulling a "stunt," and a couple of commentators dubbed the hybrid magazine *MILLIZONE*. I'd like to point out to any potentially disgruntled *IZ* readers this time around that the situation now is exactly the reverse of two years ago. Then, *IZ* subscribers were in effect being presented with a sample issue of *MILLION*. Now it's the *MILLION* readers who are being given *Interzone*. So it's *INTERZILLION*, not *MILLIZONE*.

And I'm afraid this is no stunt, but a dire necessity: *MILLION* simply could not continue. If it had gone on publishing any longer then bankruptcy would have loomed – and if that had happened then *Interzone*'s future might have been threatened too. (Neither magazine is, or ever has been, constituted as a limited-liability company; nor do I any longer have an external salary with which to underwrite *MILLION*, as I was made redundant from my book-publishing job over 18 months ago.) I do hope that subscribers to both magazines will understand.

(David Pringle)

Interaction

Dear Editors:

I felt I must write and say how good some of the fiction in the last few issues of *Interzone* has been. Nicola Griffith's "Touching Fire" and Keith Brooke's "Witness" from issue 70; William Barton's "Slowly Comes a Hungry People" and Jonathan Lethem's

"A Small Patch on My Contract" from issue 71; Stephen Baxter's "No Longer Touch the Earth" (surely his best ever) and William Spencer's "Striptease" from issue 72 were all at least equal in scope, in vision, and in quality of writing to anything I've read in Asimov's lately. I take back everything I said a year or two ago about American sf being better. Not any more it ain't!

Also – a word about illustrations. I've moaned a lot about these in the past, so when things improve I think I ought to say I've noticed. It's nice to see illos of good quality which enhance, rather than detract from, the story. I'm particularly thinking of Gerry Grace for "Slowly Comes a Hungry People" and "No Longer Touch the Earth," and Kevin Cullen for "As We Forgive Our Debtors"; but the cover illos on all three issues I've mentioned were also particularly good. I hope this continues.

PS. I've just seen the illos for Eric Brown's "Paramathea" (IZ 72). Ugh! Take them away!

P.J.L. Hinder
Bristol

Dear Editors:

Are you pleased with *Interzone*? I guess I am, but...

Recently I looked again at *IZ* numbers 1 to 8. Having studied these magazines, with an inner ear cocked to *Interzone*'s current issues, I have a few comments to make.

Firstly, let's get one thing straight. *Interzone* has changed. But that's as to be expected – *IZ* couldn't have survived (and thrived) for the past eleven years without change. However, some of these changes I would like to, if not cast disapproval upon, then at least question.

Considering the (obvious, I think) increased budget that *IZ* is working to, and the years of editorial alteration and readership feedback, I find it incredible that the quality of illustration has fallen so dramatically and consistently since the first issues. And I'm not just talking about interior pictures, but the covers too. In the dim and distant, *Interzone* had a limited number of colours to work with on the cover, and consequently an effort was made to make the best possible use of the resources available – and a stunning cover was produced. Nowadays, for better or for worse, *IZ* has a fully coloured face. Just like every other newsstand offering. It seems rare

though, when a modern cover is in any way innovative, eye-catching, or even appealing.

Not to beat about the bush, Interzone lacks visual style. I'm not only concerned with what is depicted by the artists (all too often textbook examples of the spaceship & raygun genre), but their style of artwork too. I refer you to the work of Ian Miller (issues 3 and 4), George Parkin (issue 4), Pete Lyon (4), John Michals (6), David Price (6) and Kate Simpson (6 and 8). The work of all these is outstanding. These people all had wide-ranging styles (including near-caricatures and the cartoon-esque), and weren't afraid to choose non-obvious scenarios for depiction, and unusual "camera-angles." Now we have reached the 70-issue mark, things seem to have settled down into a kind of routine – each illustrator seems to apply some carefully derived (so as not to offend/stimulate/interest anyone) artistic formula to each picture. The style of every picture is the same – a kind of uninteresting photorealism which ensures there is little difference between the work of each artist. The magazine needs images which match the imaginative and ground-breaking fiction which has become synonymous with the name of Interzone.

Part of the trouble is that IZ fits in so well with the rows of W.H. Smith fodder. Its nondescript glorious technicolor cover blends imperceptibly with the glossy covers of *Cosmo* and *Hello!*...

Take a look at your magazine. Take some risks. Visually, the magazine needs to move in a new direction. Interzone's appearance is not only a slur against its excellent fictional content, but a slur against everything bearing the title "science fiction" – including those who read and write it.

David Alexander

Bolton, Lancs

Editor: Do other readers agree?

Dear Editors:
What a load of prolix! I am referring to the article by S.T. Joshi in *MILLION* no. 13, described as presenting "the case against bestselling author Stephen King." 'Scuse my ignorance but I hadn't realized that King had been accused of anything, and I must confess that even after reading Joshi's piece I am still unclear as to what crime Mr King has supposedly committed. Joshi on the other hand could easily be charged with being in possession of an offensive arrogance.

Early on in his article he makes the staggering statement that "the majority of people who buy books are not well-read in standard literature..."! As a member of that book-buying public I find the literary élitism implicit in this statement galling in the extreme,

especially as Joshi's condescending attitude towards the "ordinary" reader is repeated throughout his article. One has to ask why Joshi would risk offending his audience in such a fashion. The answer is readily to hand. Before Joshi can launch into his petty nit-picking of King's works he has to overcome that old maxim "You can't argue with success." I mean, if one goes into print stating that, "My general verdict on King is that his ideas are poorly conceived, his style verbose, his morality unadventurous and his characterization hackneyed," then one has to account for the phenomenal sales of this obviously inferior author's work. Sadly, the only reason for King's success that seems to spring to Joshi's mind is that the majority of people who buy his novels wouldn't know a good book even if it was rammed down their throats by Mr Joshi himself.

As if it were a crime, Joshi states that King "has more in common with Krantz, Danielle Steel, Sidney Sheldon and other writers who cater to popular sentiment, than he does with Poe, Lovecraft and Blackwood." You can almost hear the sneer in the phrase "popular sentiment." So what's Mr Joshi's beef, is he seriously charging King with the felony of being a bestselling author? Or is it his objection that King is a bestselling author despite churning out, with "robotic regularity," bland pap for the masses? If so, then he is guilty of double-think, stating that the quality of King's work does not warrant his popularity, whilst implying that only populist works will be accepted by that majority of people who buy books but who are not well read in standard literature. Or maybe I'm missing the main thrust of Joshi's diatribe, perhaps Stephen King's success doesn't concern him overmuch, perhaps he aims his criticism at a higher, more aesthetic level, unhappy with the "literary" quality of King's work. If that was the reason he wrote this piece – to point out to the world that Stephen King may sell a lot of books, but hey, that don't make it great literature does it – then I have to ask, why bother? King himself is quoted in Joshi's article as saying that he is the literary equivalent of a "Big Mac and a large fries from McDonald's." No, what seems to really upset Mr Joshi is that King is a successful, populist author who has chosen as his main area of operation the field of horror.

Why does this fact bother him so? Let's see: "His domination of the bestseller lists over the last two decades has been an unmitigated disaster for the weird tale: by being the chief exemplar of the 'banalization' of horror, he has caused the wrong type of weird fiction – commonplace, flabby, sentimental work full of 'human interest' but lacking in originality of

conception – to gain popular esteem. As a result genuinely dynamic work... has been relegated to comparative obscurity."

So this is what annoys you, Mr Joshi; in your estimation King's style is poor, his scenarios commonplace, but worse than this, in your arrogance you have decided that King's weird fiction is the wrong type of weird fiction. When I first came across that statement in your article I really couldn't believe what I was reading; here was a supposedly serious author suggesting that there is a right type of horror story and a wrong type of tale!

If I seem scathing about Mr Joshi's article, I apologize, but then I found the article itself arrogant and negative in the extreme. In the few instances where he found something good to say about King, the faint praise was delivered in a restrained almost schoolmasterish way, a "shows some promise," "could do better" condescension.

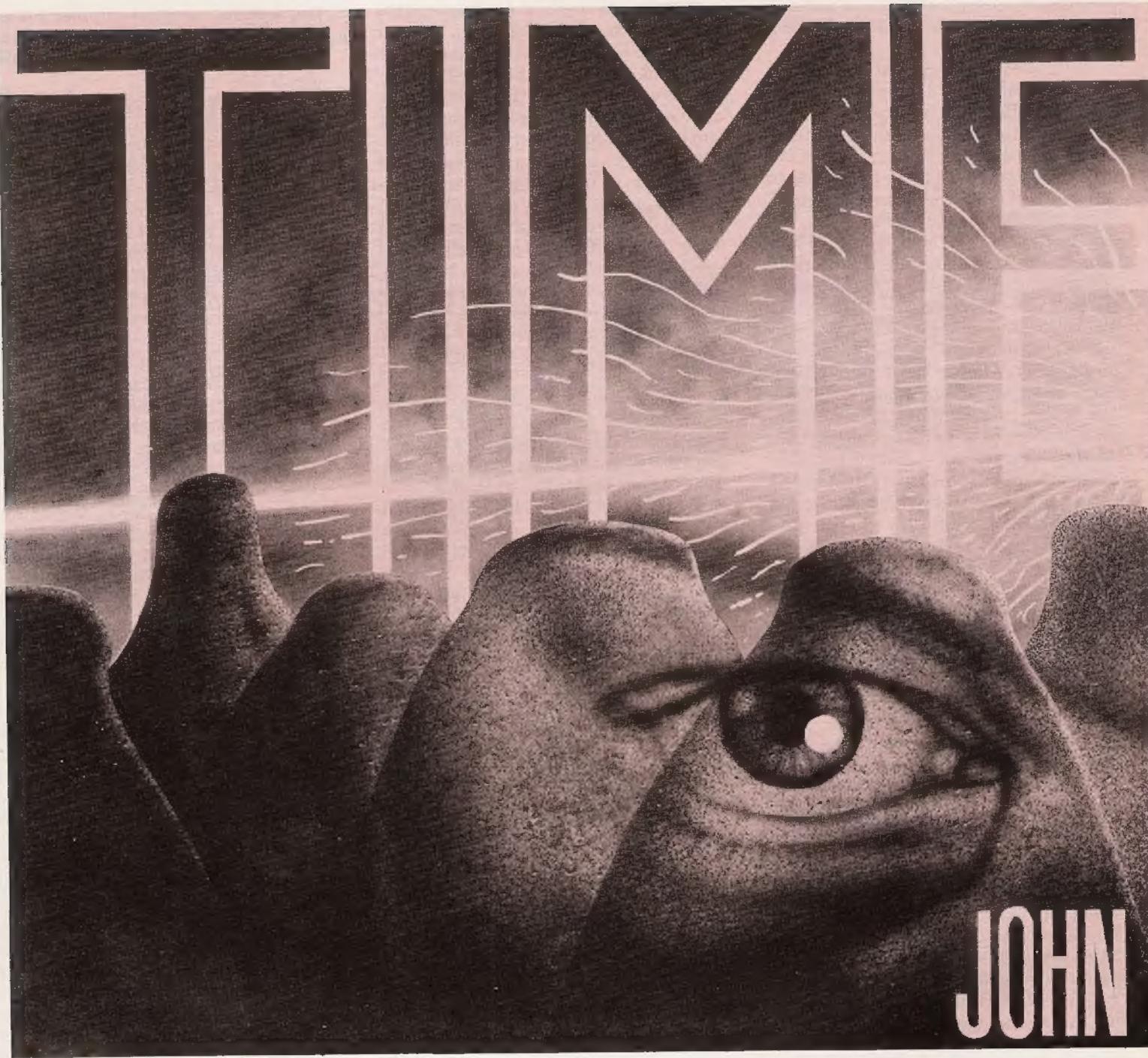
Should Mr Joshi attempt to relegate me to one of his three categories of King's supporters, i.e. "mere sycophant," "ignorant of weird or mainstream fiction" or simply "dazzled by King's fame," let me lay out where I stand. I was brought up on a diet of books including the works of H.P. Lovecraft, Poe, Wheatley and William Hope Hodgson, all of whom delivered their works in their own highly individual styles. I am neither a sycophant nor dazzled easily by fame. Indeed I have my own views on King's shortcomings. Recent works have been a disappointment. Sometimes the thinness of the plot does not warrant the thickness of the book, *Gerald's Game* being a perfect example of this. Nobody's perfect, yet the fact remains that Stephen King's stories still please a lot of the people a lot of the time. I consider *Salem's Lot* an excellent update of the vampire tale, whilst "*The Mist*" is a genuinely frightening short story and one which I would suggest Mr Joshi reads again as his synopsis of the plot is largely wrong. I could continue praising and damning King's work, but then couldn't we all.

Colin Munro

Redhill, Surrey

Editor: In defence of S.T. Joshi, I should point out that he has already written a substantial book called *The Weird Tale* (University of Texas Press, 1990) in which he lays out in detail his criteria for what constitutes the "right type" of weird fiction, taking as his exemplars such authors as Machen, Dunsany, Blackwood, M.R. James, Bierce and Lovecraft. Also, the Joshi essay on Stephen King will appear (in lengthier form) in a new book alongside pieces on such fine modern writers of weird fiction as Robert Aickman,

Continued on page 42



From horizon to horizon, a narrow silver ribbon was threaded across a pale peach sunset-washed sky, touched by a wash of translucent grey clouds. Within the core of the high-altitude superfluid – superconducting and frictionless, and possessed of other properties which were less than public knowledge – a metal sphere was speeding. Though it was large enough to carry a dozen passengers, magnetic forces flicked it through the silver fluid like a ball bearing fired from a catapult.

It passed high above an archipelago, dark islands trapped in a sea shining like a pastel mirror. Onwards, over hills clustered like islands on a dark rift floor. Then out over a dead plain where a myriad great stone urns rose from the lifeless rock.

On the ground, movement. A small hand-held device suddenly poked above the lip of an urn. No noise, no spitting light. But up above, the superfluid thread jerked and split into a hundred bucking streamers. As the magnetic containment field went wild, turbulence broke the superfluid apart and spat it in all directions across the sky.

The metal sphere fell through a curved trajectory, its forward velocity enough to carry it far beyond the urn where the saboteur lurked.

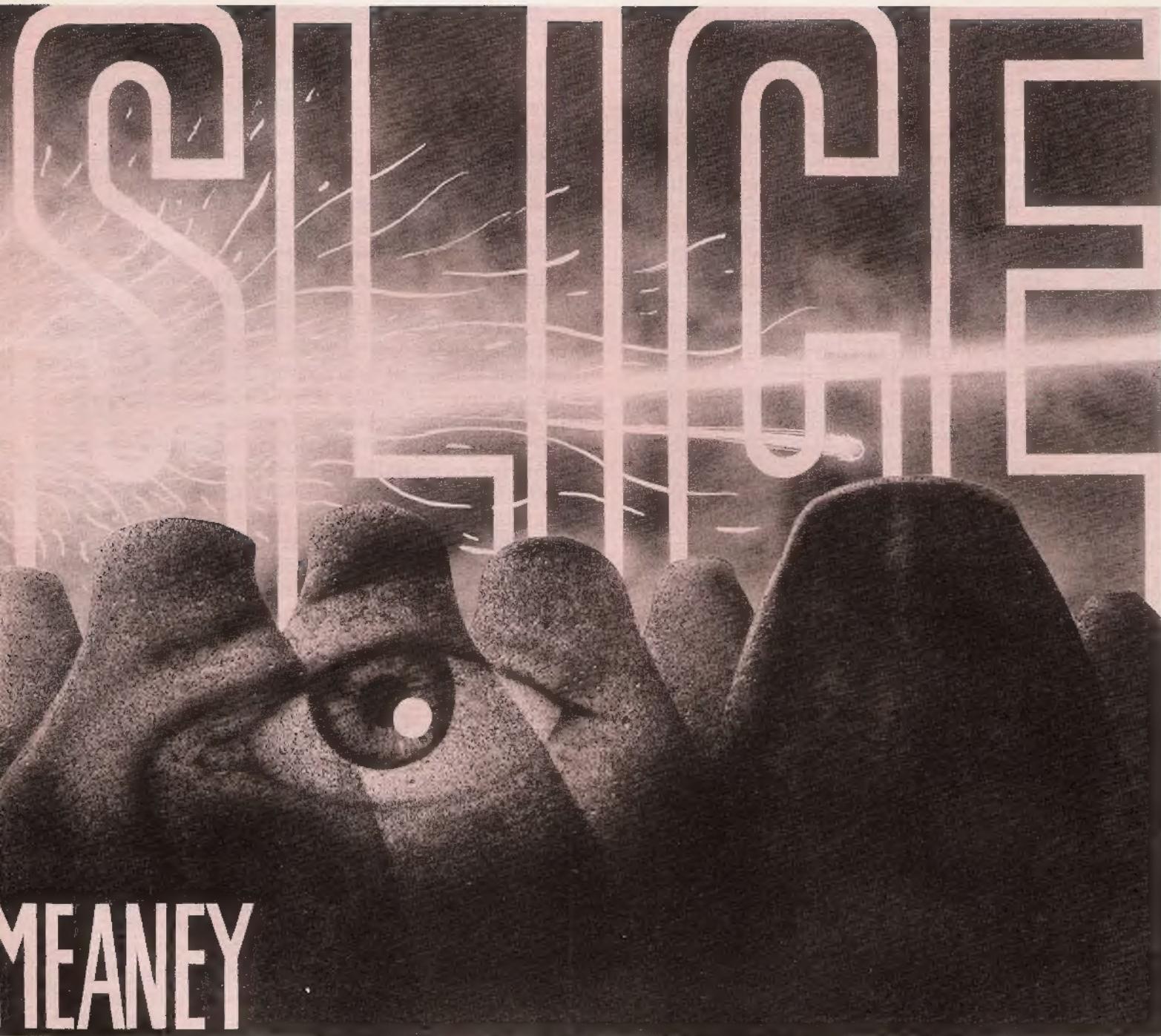
The impact smashed through the evening's stillness, obliterating several urns. Gravel flew as the sphere bounced and came to rest, its surface marred by a dark ugly crack.

A kilometre away, the device's dark-hooded operator squirmed up over the urn's rim. From a dozen hiding places, other dark figures sprang up noiselessly. It took four minutes for them to run to the crash site. They swarmed over the spherical vessel and used pulse lasers to cut their way in.

They pulled out a slight, grey-haired man who was groaning though unconscious. They strapped him to a stretcher and carried him to some broken ground which was free of urns, and waited.

Three helicopters came scudding through the fading light. A thunderous downdraught washed over the men as the copters touched down. Within seconds everyone was aboard.

The three copters ascended and flew in arrow



MEANEY

formation towards the setting sun, moving quickly. They had to be down and in hiding by midnight, by timeslice's end.

Peter Duval groaned and rolled out of bed. He staggered across the small attic bedroom and depolarized the window. Outside, above the crowded roofscape of Paris, hung a crystalline blue sky crossed by half a dozen silver superfluid threads. Voices echoed from the narrow cobbled street, the old concierge trading insults with the local kids.

Peter forced himself to limber up, using the iron radiator as a barre. His nose wrinkled at a sour smell. Dammit! Yesterday (subjective) he must have left some milk open in the kitchen alcove. Four days (real-time) later, it was stinking. What sort of degenerates lived here during the other timeslices, not to notice it? Impossible that his apartment might be unoccupied during the other timeslices, not this close to the city centre. Disgusted, he poured the rotten stuff away.

His mother's house had six scuttlebots. Here, two scuttlebots served a whole apartment block full of

students and nightclub "hostesses." The scuttlebots picked up any sheets of paper diligently, to avoid communication between timeslices, all links with the other three-quarters of humanity severed. Hygiene seemed a lower priority.

Showered and dressed, he packed dance slippers, leotard and towel into a duffel bag. Ignoring the mail-waiting icon, he took the flat-screen display from his desk and rolled it into a tube and dropped it, too, into the duffel bag, followed by its keypad and a handful of maths tutorial crystals.

Duffel bag over his shoulder, he left quickly, moving agilely down four flights of stairs and out into the street. Twenty days ago (subjective) it had been icy midwinter, and now it was spring. In his childhood, each season had seemed endless, but that was when the whole world was living in realtime, instead of living one day out of every four, each quarter of humanity taking its turn on the rota. Breathing deeply of the fresh Parisian air and pushing the past from his mind, Peter headed off towards the Sorbonne.

That afternoon, sitting in warm sunlight on the steps of the maths department, Peter unrolled his terminal. The sender ID on his incoming note was Tatiana Duval. Mother. The note was untranslated, and it took a moment to switch gear and decipher the Cyrillic characters. She enquired about his ballet and noted pointedly that he was now fifth in the maths department. He would show her. By the end of the year, he would be top of the class.

Time for his next lecture. When he got to the lecture theatre he found about a hundred other students crowding into the amphitheatre-shaped room. Unusual. Most people accessed on-line lectures and rarely turned up in person. Bemused, he saw several people he knew from different courses and years to his own, who should not be here at all.

Professor Gruner entered to applause and the stamping of enthusiastic feet. Pretending indifference, he began his lecture by dredging up the basic equations of the coherent time-jump effect, holographic symbols glowing amber in the air above the lecturer's podium. The students became restless as he activated a stylized graphic illustration of coherent wave functions tunnelling through the barrier of future time. Kids' stuff.

Professor Gruner stopped. "Not interested, hein? Perhaps all this theory is dry and boring?" There were whistles and catcalls. Peter saw that most of his classmates were as puzzled as he was, though the unknown - mostly older - students were flushed with anticipation. Then Gruner, not quite hiding his smile, shrugged expressively and turned off the lecturer's display. At the same time, some of the physics lab technicians began wheeling in a large silver framework mounted on a trolley. The applause was tremendous.

The framework was two metres high, and after a small panel on one vertex was connected to a power supply the technicians set up a step ladder beside it. The professor climbed the ladder while the technicians took care to hold the ladder rock steady. At the top, the professor removed an egg from his jacket pocket with a flourish. Then he leaned over the framework and dropped the egg. It sailed down towards the floor until it reached the midpoint, where it vanished. The professor descended the ladder, the power was temporarily switched off while the framework was moved to one side, and everybody waited expectantly.

Two minutes later the egg reappeared exactly where it had vanished. It fell to the ground and smashed, as the students jumped to their feet and applauded. Peter was standing and clapping his hands with the rest of them, wondering how on earth the professor had obtained permission to rig a time jump. It took a while for everyone to calm down and take their seats again, so that the professor could continue with his demonstration. Peter gathered from various comments that this was an annual event. The students all watched spellbound as the professor took them through a series of demonstrations with all the panache and showmanship of a master conjuror.

Afterwards, Peter wandered out into one of the courtyards and, head reeling, sat down on the ground with his back against a statue of Victor Hugo, his barely remembered childhood coming back to haunt

him. If only he could jump back into the past, to a time when his father had been there. Stupid. Impossible to jump back against the entropy flow, only possible to tunnel forwards through it. Grow up, why don't you?

The world's time zones had been redefined logically two decades ago, splitting the world into 24 equal segments. As each time zone reached midnight, that was the end of a timeslice and time for the Scheduler to do on a grand scale what Peter had just witnessed in the lecture theatre.

He skipped the tutorial he was scheduled to attend and instead arrived early at the dance academy. The tension drained out of him as he walked up the steps and into the marble foyer. He loved the atmosphere of this place, the sweaty smell of effort, the squeaking thumping sounds of dancers, the music, the cajoling teachers' voices. Putting their students under pressure, hoping that grace would emerge.

He changed quickly, ignoring the cuts on his gnarled feet as he pulled on his slippers.

It was too early to start warming up so he wandered down the corridor, peeking curiously through the glass doors of the studios. He grinned as he watched a schoolkids' class, then looked in at a *Swan Lake* rehearsal which stopped him dead. A blonde brown-eyed girl was dancing at the back, technically merely proficient, but with a stunning depth of feeling and expression.

Later, during his own lesson, he saw her at the door just as he leaped high and kicked back, badly, his foot actually brushing the head of the man behind him.

"If you want to kick somebody's face in," said the teacher caustically, "please take up karate or savate. This is a dance studio."

Everybody laughed. Peter flushed with embarrassment.

After the lesson he found her waiting in the foyer.

"I recognized you from the university," she said. "I thought you were a dancer when I first saw you."

"Naturally graceful."

"Unnaturally dangerous, I'd call it." Her laugh was silvery and clear, her brown eyes simultaneously innocent and knowing, eyes a young man could drown in.

Her name was Sophie, and she was a medical student who took some maths courses at Peter's department. They went to a streetside cafe where they sat drinking bitter coffee and watching the passers-by. As she talked easily about her parents and family pets, she seemed far removed from the intense woman Peter had watched dancing.

"My mother lives in Moscow," Peter said, when she asked about his family. "She was born there, but only returned a few years ago. I was mostly raised in Toronto, where Pop came from."

"That explains the accent, then," said Sophie.

"I don't have an accent." Peter smiled slyly. "You people have an accent."

"Funny." She touched his hand. "You've dual nationality, then."

"Yeah, for what it's worth," he said, unwanted bitterness tingeing his voice. "That's how I lost Pop when I was seven. I can't remember his face, just a big dark-haired man who was a tower of strength, you know?"

"What happened?"

"When Russia went Timeshare," he said, "we were vacationing in Moscow. Pop heard rumours about their treatment of foreign nationals and tried to get us out. But the soldiers got us and took us for surgery. The rumours were right. Our implants were set for different timeslices, and Mother and I never saw Pop again." He watched the boulevard with empty eyes, seeing only the past.

Sophie's eyes were suddenly damp with sympathetic tears.

"My own cousins and my schoolfriends disappeared." She unconsciously rubbed the implant scar on the back of her neck. "I was six, but I can't forget."

"Politicians everywhere moved quickly, scared enough of catastrophe to hand over power to a machine. By the third UN ballot, every dissenter had changed his or her mind, or been replaced by someone who agreed with the consensus."

Sophie looked at him. "You seem to know a lot of details."

"Hard not to." He laughed bitterly. "Pop was a scientist on the Scheduler project, transferred from the UN space programme. Working for the future."

"I'm sorry."

There was a distant crump. Traffic accident or explosion? A few passers-by stopped momentarily, then dismissed the sound and carried on. Peter and Sophie waited.

Two minutes later, a phalanx of mirror-helmeted UN troopers swept by on silent levitating scooters. Anti-terrorist squad.

"Bastards," said Sophie. "I was taken to a Unificationist anti-Scheduler rally once. Stupid radicals who tried to pretend the Bad Years never really happened."

"The Bad Years weren't just propaganda."

"I know. But I saw those troopers break up the meeting, and they weren't gentle about it."

Peter escorted Sophie back to her apartment block. At the entrance, he kissed her on the cheek. The sensation was exquisite.

Walking home, the ground felt springy beneath his feet, like the studio floor, as though he were dancing along the boulevards.

Alex Duval awoke coughing up blood. The room was white, with bright sunlight streaming through skylights. Medical equipment was hooked up to his body. The university infirmary? Saigon? What about his students?

He drifted off to sleep.

When he woke again, there were half a dozen men standing around his bed. Hard-looking men. They did not seem like doctors.

"Please help me," he said.

The men looked at each other. This was not good.

A huge beefy man with shaven head and bushy moustache peered at Alex with half-hooded eyes.

"Pathetic bastard," he muttered.

"Now, now, Vigneron." A small Oriental man with long hair touched the big man's arm. "Dr Duval is going to help us. There's nothing personal in this."

"Nothing personal –"

"He fought against the Bad Years, and paid a high price himself."

"Nothing compared to other people," said the giant Vigneron.

The Oriental looked at one of his other colleagues. "Start now."

"He's weak –"

"He might grow weaker. Please, just do it."

"All right." The man bent over the bedside controls.

Fire swept through Alex's veins, plunging him into painful memory, back to their typically Muscovite hotel room, with its twin beds set end-to-end and a child's bed in the corner. Peter, his seven-year-old son, was flicking through a magazine and laughing at pictures of men in tights. Alex said ballet dancers were athletes and gifted artists. From the other side of the room, Tatiana asked how he could know, since he only ever thought about computers.

The door smashed open and troops poured in, weapons levelled at Tatiana. She had been a spetsnaz commander in the élite forces, and they were taking no chances. Alex, soft and untrained, was no threat at all.

They were taken for surgery in separate vehicles.

"He's coming round."

Tatiana!

"I'm giving him adrenaline. Talk to him now."

He grew aware of his surroundings. The white room. Not a hospital. These people were terrorists.

"Why me?" he asked.

"At last," muttered Vigneron.

The Oriental leaned over Alex. "My name is Chiang, Dr Duval. We need to talk to you about the Scheduler."

"Ask the Scheduler. You can call it –" Alex paused for breath. "From any terminal. It's – it's very intelligent."

"I know." The man touched Alex's forearm gently. "You worked on spinlink technology for the space programme, and on the jump effect"

"No – planets," Alex breathed.

"No, you couldn't find habitable planets." He was referring to their inability to find targets for the jump effect. Until astronomical observation found planets in other systems, a space jump would be a one-way trip to a lonely orbit around a distant star with no hope of life. "So you joined the Scheduler project."

Alex squeezed his eyes shut, not wanting to remember. "World – too many people."

"Bad times," said Chiang. "The Bad Years. Wars. Eco-disasters. You wanted to help." He waited, but Alex did not respond. "Your spinlink techniques were used in the implants, to establish the link with the Scheduler."

Alex shook his head.

"Tell us about the encryption. Tell us about the protocols. You'll feel better then."

Alex shook his head again, more feebly this time.

"It's not going to work," said Vigneron.

"Shut up!" said Chiang.

Tell them. The equations and specifications hung before his mind's eye. He could tell them, if he could only understand – Too complex. Of course he understood it. But it was complicated. He would explain it all to them tomorrow. After breakfast in the morning. First, he needed to sleep.

"We're losing him." A distant voice.

"God damn it!" A heavy grip seized Alex's throat.

"Talk, you bastard! Tell us! The bloody protocol!"

"Stop it." The Oriental's voice faded.

Alex wandered through disjointed memories. How fresh the world was, years ago! Meeting Tatiana, how beautiful she was. Wonderful times. Peter's birth. Tatiana never cried, though Alex did. His son. Their son.

Some part of him noted: this is how a mind disintegrates. Parts of his personality were reliving different experiences. How very like an AI. So this is how it feels to be the Scheduler.

"Dr Duval?" Odd echoes in the voice. A dark figure in the blood-covered twilight, calling him. Was this death?

Go away. Go away go away. His mind screamed, his lips whispered.

Hours passed. Aeons passed. Not pain, but a feeling beyond agony, the grip of approaching death.

Help me, mister. Help me, mister. Help me, mister. He whimpered.

He did not want to go.

Days passed. Aeons passed. Dark chaos tumbled all around him. He wanted to hold on, he wanted to let go. His life was ending.

After a day and a night of hell, someone pressed a button out of mercy, and soothing drugs washed through him.

And Alex died.

He woke up remembering his death. Outside, silver superfluid threads and the distant Eiffel Tower were framed against a sapphire sky. Staggering to the mirror, he ran a hand through his grey – no, his dark hair. His reflection was leanly muscled.

Peter screamed.

He put on his clothes like an automaton, and went outside. He stumbled along the streets like a sleep-walker scarcely aware of his surroundings, until he reached Sophie's apartment block.

Outside her front door, he started to slump, then forced himself to stand upright and press the buzzer. Sophie opened the door immediately, shocked by his appearance.

"Tatia – Sophie," he said. "Help me. Please, help me." Her gentle hands led him inside, guided him to a sofa.

"Sit down. Tell me what has happened."

"I died," he said calmly.

Tatiana – no, Sophie – knelt down in front of him and took his pulse.

"I died," he said. "I remember every second of it."

"Did you take anything? It's important that you tell me, Peter." She looked into his eyes very carefully.

"You sound just like them."

"Like who?"

"Like the men who killed me."

She breathed out. "I'm going to get you something to make you feel better." She gently disengaged herself. "Don't worry. I'll be right back." She fumbled in a small medical bag.

"Don't leave me," he whispered.

"I'm not. See?" She knelt back down in front of him, forcing herself to stay calm. "This might make you feel sick. Tell me if it does."

Peter nodded.

"Good boy. Here we go." She stuck the skin patch on his neck. The drugs entered his bloodstream immediately.

Peter felt the world slip out of focus. "Sleepy," he said.

"That's okay. When you wake up, you'll be in hospital."

"No!" He trembled violently.

"Don't worry, I won't leave you."

"Will it be a real hospital?"

She patted his cheek. "Yes," she said, relieved as he quietened down. "It'll be a real one."

He slipped forwards, and Sophie caught him. He grabbed her arm fiercely. "You're Sophie," he said. "Not Tatiana. Sophie."

"That's right, lie back."

"Spinlink," he said desperately, trying to focus. "Sophie. Remember. Spinlink."

The world slipped away from him. It was so much easier than dying.

Peter came to in a hospital bed. In a corner of the room sat a grey-haired hatchet-faced woman in a dark jumpsuit, her back ramrod straight. Holding an apple, she split it deftly in two, cleaving a flat plane.

"Tatiana," he said. "Mother. Still like to make sure it's dead before you eat it?"

She stopped still. "So it's true, then."

"I remember: 'It's our duty to test the spinlink, Alex. Measure one set of particles to force its complement faster than light. Instantaneous. Easy.'" Separating paired particles in the so-called singlet state, their spin unpredictable until measured. As one particle was measured, the information on how the measurement was made, how the wave function was collapsed, travelled instantaneously across space to its separated twin. Or else history was rewritten, the information travelling back through time to the moment the twin particles were separated, so the other twin would then carry that information on into its future. Either interpretation of the equations seemed valid. Einstein had shown that quantum physics predicted this effect and based his rejection of the whole theory on the basis that it was obviously impossible, not living to see the experimental proof in Paris in the 1980s.

"Alex?"

"Not exactly," said Peter, fighting to sort his father's memories from his own.

"You must hate me," she whispered.

He did not answer, his mind pulled into recollections of work on the spinlink, on finding that the separation effect worked differently in complex systems, and best of all on twinned RNA molecules implanted in living brains immediately after separation. It was a weird emergent property from the complexity of thinking organisms, that information from one set of collapsing wave functions – encapsulated as thoughts and memories – were replicated in the second set.

"I'm going now," said Tatiana. "You've a young friend outside who's been anxious about you."

She stood up, looking old. She had not forgotten what Peter had just learned, that only death triggered

the effect. Had space jumps been successful, it would have been the only method of communication with expeditions, and both Tatiana and Peter – as Alex – remembered grisly jokes about human flight recorders.

"Mother. I never realized the resemblance I bore to Dad, what pain I caused you every time you looked at me. I'm sorry, Mother."

She laughed, harshly. "Forgiveness, is it? Are you sure you're my son?" She stood up very easily for a woman of her years. In her 50s, she still worked out for three hours a day, working hard on the weights and on the running track, and keeping her deadlier skills ticking over.

As she left, Peter called out, "Alex loved you, Tatiana, more than life. His last thoughts were of you."

Tatiana left without looking back.

She went to a nearby kickboxing club she had found from Public Information, buying some training kit from a sports shop on the way. She sparred with a fierce young girl in the ring until the gym owner, himself a heavyweight ex-champion, stepped into the ring between them to save the girl from further punishment.

Foolishly, he agreed to spar with Tatiana himself. She broke his ribs with a shin kick and hooked an elbow into his face. She left him spitting out blood on the plastic mat.

Everyone was very kind. He convalesced at Sophie's apartment, and her tutors allowed her to take time off to care for him. His friends and Sophie's came to visit.

"Everyone's being very nice to me," he said one afternoon, sitting on the couch wrapped in a blanket.

A small black-and-white kitten sat on Sophie's lap, an adopted stray called Squeak. She rubbed Squeak's implant scar.

"Your mother hasn't called since she went back, thank God. No offence."

"None taken. You think my mother's a heartless bitch. Why should I be offended?"

"You shouldn't be. She is. Are we going to have the same argument again?"

"No, darling. I'm going to read the news and you're going to go to your tutorial."

"They won't mind if...Are you sure you won't mind if I go?"

"You know I've got my strength back."

Sophie blushed a little. "Time for a kittenectomy, then." She transferred Squeak to Peter's lap. "By the way, some more lab results came through. I forgot to tell you," she said, not having forgotten at all but only just deciding that he was strong enough to take the news.

"What were they?" he asked distractedly, while Squeak ran up one arm, across his shoulders and back down the other arm and flopped over, exhausted, and fell into a deep dreamless kitten sleep.

"Some of the spinlink particles in your thalamus are still in the singlet state," she said. "They didn't trip. Maybe that's why you can't sort out Alex's memories."

"Oh."

"You're not worried?"



"Should I be?"

"Not in the slightest." She kissed him. "See you later."

She rushed out while he watched, grinning foolishly.

His grin faded as he looked down at the screen. He switched to voice and asked for public information, geographic systems. He described the plain which had been visible from the falling transport bubble.

"Plain of Jars, Laos." A picture was displayed, overlaid by the map coordinates. It was the place, all right.

"Well done, Scheduler. Log off."

Given the memory jog, he remembered Alex had been en route to Saigon University. On the academic circuit, since his resignation from the Scheduler project. For Peter, it was a starting point for the search.

One problem. Alex's killers lived in a different timeslice.

He called Reception at the university hospital.

"Do you have a booking for Peter Duval to attend an operation? A spinlink removal."

"Yes, sir," said the AI. "Operation pending, date and time to be assigned."

Peter had turned the conversation away from an operation topic every time Sophie or a doctor had tried to talk about it. But they were ready for him.

"An AutoDoc 9000?"

"That is correct."

"Schedule the operation for three hours' time. I am Peter Duval." He leaned over the screen.

"Retina confirmed. Authorized."

"Log off."

He inserted a small crystal into the terminal and uploaded his working notes on programming surgical AIs. After a few minutes he shut it off, having memorized as much as he ever would. To calm himself, he put on some music and worked out for two hours, warming up with a thousand plies and finishing off with static stretching in the splits position. He had only had a two-day layoff from dancing, while he was in hospital, and had practiced in secret every day since then. His strength and fitness were only a little below normal. Physically he was almost completely recovered. As for the rest – he put that out of his mind. He showered and dressed, gave Squeak a saucer of milk, and left for the hospital.

He discharged himself after the op and headed straight for a student bar. It was dark, packed and noisy. He sipped orange juice and watched ungainly students thrash about to the music. His body ached for a proper workout in a dance studio.

As midnight approached, the bar began to empty, but the diehards were dancing frenetically to ever louder music. Dancing through a timeslice's end had never held appeal for Peter; he was normally asleep by this time.

11:58. What to expect? He imagined the Scheduler causing massive transmitters to hum into action, using something very like a spinlink to establish contact with every person's implant in this time zone, to remotely trigger the coherence effect which would cause the jump forwards.

At midnight everybody vanished. There was an afterimage of flayed red flesh, as though skin and

clothes had disappeared first. A half memory of disembodied eyes, brains, black tracery of nerves. But the bar was empty.

Silence. At one a.m. in four days (realtime), the music would pick up exactly where it had left off, along with the dancers.

In the meantime, at one a.m. today, in one hour, a new population would pop into existence, taking their turn at bat. Slight scratching noises indicated that the scuttlebots were coming out to tidy up, getting ready for the new timeslice. Time to go. He went out into the eerie silence of an empty night.

He was now homeless for three days (realtime) out of every four. He had converted all his wealth into a general credit chip, unkeyed for any specific individual and therefore untraceable to him, with a large enough balance for a long distance bubble transport. But he had to wait at least till one a.m. Until then, only scuttlebots and feral cats and dogs should be on the move in this time zone. Time-zone breakers were treated as dissidents, and there were many rumours about their fate.

From a transport nexus high above the city he took a bubble east over Europe. En route, as the enclosed sphere sped through the silver superfluid, he called the Registrar at Saigon University. The AI listed visiting professors but there was no entry for Alex Duval. Wrong timeslice.

He stopped overnight in Teheran. A hotel room would be expected by the machines to become vacant at midnight (realtime), so it had to be another night on the streets. He hid shivering in a dark alley wrapped up in a rug bought from a bazaar. He only felt safe during the empty hour after midnight.

Next day he continued his journey, flying onwards over the unseen desert, trying to read but giving up, unable to concentrate.

His third night was spent in a Saigon park, under a spreading rhododendron. Awoken at sunrise by a group of elderly T'ai Chi practitioners, he unfolded his terminal and called the university. Right timeslice.

The Vice Chancellor herself met Peter on the campus, to express her condolences and to take him around the science faculty. The staff seemed genuinely upset by Alex's death, which had been reported as a transport accident.

Peter watched their reactions closely – through the filter of Alex's memories – looking for a word or gesture that might suggest complicity. Nothing. They tried to hide only their surprise that Alex had had a son they knew nothing about, but the physical resemblance was too strong for them to doubt his identity.

Peter was tired and learning nothing. He said goodbye to Alex's colleagues and called a hotel to book a room. He would crash out for a few hours before starting again this evening.

He went on foot, trying to plan his actions should Alex's memories lead him to the terrorists. He had one great advantage: at midnight of whatever day he found them, they would disappear and he would have three whole days in which to prepare an unwelcome surprise for their reappearance seventy-three hours later.

The hotel was a white pagoda-roofed building

nestled among cypress trees. Peter's way was blocked by a procession of bonzes, white- and orange-robed Buddhist priests, flanked by two rows of graceful women. Maybe he could find a way round the back.

He started to push his way through the crowd, but became suddenly aware of two men also forcing a determined passage through the onlookers and headed right for him. He froze, not expecting anything to happen so quickly, then started to back away. A third man grabbed his collar from behind and jerked him off balance. Peter tried to twist free but a hand slapped against his neck, stunning him but also sticking a skin patch directly over the artery, and the world instantly tilted. Strong hands carried him to a vehicle. They dumped him on a seat, from which he slid as the vehicle moved off. He could see and feel the carpet of the floor-well pressed against his face, but movement was impossible, his muscles paralysed by whatever drug the skin patch had pumped into him.

Sophie scowled at Tatiana's furious image on the screen.

"He did it himself," Sophie said.

"Your hospital's machine performed the operation!"

"Your son reprogrammed it!"

"And you talked about it over a comms link."

"I'm going to report it to the Scheduler anyway."

The spinlink which had linked Peter and his father was still intact. Instead, the surgical AI had removed a separate though similar structure from Peter's brain, the Scheduler implant which all human beings and their pets carried with them, nowadays from birth.

At the hospital, only Sophie had found out what Peter had done, and she had hidden the knowledge from the other staff. The Scheduler would only find out if Sophie informed it – or if this call was being monitored at random.

"Stupid!" said Tatiana. "They'll arrest you for sure."

"But he's been gone four days, realtime." Tears began to trickle down Sophie's face.

"He isn't dead," said Tatiana.

"I love him," blurted Sophie.

"I can see that." Tatiana cut the link.

Peter's captors slapped him awake again. His third day without sleep.

On the first night the big man, Vigneron, had held a beefy forearm in front of Peter's face. Vigneron did not wear a watch, instead he had a time display imprinted in his skin, programmable chromic cells in his epidermis. The black tattooed digits counted slowly up to midnight – and carried on counting. Realtime. Vigneron remained as solid as ever, and so did the other terrorists. Peter shook. It was stupid of him to have thought that he was the only person ever to remove his Scheduler implant.

They strapped him to the bed where Alex had died. Tomography showed that the spinlink was still intact, that only the time-jump implant was gone.

They had asked no questions, merely prevented him from sleeping. Merely. He could hardly focus his eyes. Hard to remember sometimes that he was Peter, for he was brimful of Alex's memories ready to spill out.

The music flowed through the sunny studio as Sophie danced alone. She was scarcely conscious of the awesome power in her jumps, the poignancy in her smallest gesture.

Afterwards, breathing heavily, she ejected the music crystal from her terminal and called the Scheduler. It took time to get through the bureaucracy of subsystems to the Scheduler's higher cognitive functions, and to give it all the information she had.

"You erased the AutoDoc's log?"

Sophie nodded.

"Good." The common belief was that tampering with implants caused irreversible brain damage, an incorrect belief which suited the Scheduler's purpose.

Sophie relaxed. The Scheduler sounded almost human.

"If Peter Duval were exiled, you would want to be with him?" it asked.

"I – yes. Please send us to the same place."

"And the same time, more or less."

"More or less?" She felt light headed. "What do you mean?"

"'More or less' is a hedge, defined by the integral of one minus mu F over X, over the fuzzy set of time coordinates." Annotated equations appeared on the display.

Suddenly the Scheduler was a collection of trivalent quantum gates and nothing like a human being at all. Did it mean it would not or could not send her and Peter to exile together?

"You work to immense precision," she said. "Lovers hugging at the end of a timeslice don't end up with their molecules mixed."

"Individuals occupy distinct coordinates in inference space. Space-time is imprecise."

Inference space? A synonym for the Scheduler's imagination? But – it's real."

In answer, an erratic cursor scribbled a line which quickly filled the screen. "That is the locus followed by your eyes as they transmitted inverted images to your brain. What did you see?"

"A static object, the right way up," Sophie acknowledged.

"Your reality is as virtual as mine."

Sophie breathed out slowly. "Have you found Peter yet?"

"No."

She cut the comms link. Bleak silence filled the empty studio.

“What the hell's going on?" Chiang examined Peter's bruised face and the bloodied forefinger now missing a fingernail.

"He remembers nothing," said Vigneron. "We know the spinlink didn't fully trip."

"But you enjoyed asking anyway." Chiang swung Peter out of bed and began to walk him back and forth across the room.

On about the tenth traverse. Peter raised his head and looked dully at a wall mirror. From a bruised purple reflection, Alex's eyes stared back at him.

Chiang sat Peter on the bed. "We have other methods of getting information," Chiang said.

"They weren't too successful the last time," said

Vigneron. He held something in his large fist in front of Peter's face. "You know what this is, boy?"

Peter tried to focus on it. A strip of skin patches?

"A delivery system for antigen software. Introduce it into a body and it heads directly for the implant. And when the Scheduler transmits, the software uploads itself, along the link wave and into the Scheduler itself." He slapped Peter. "If only we had the link protocol."

"Enough," said Chiang. "Your methods are hardly scientific."

"But effective." Vigneron laughed. "He's a dancer, for God's sake. He cried when I hit him." He laughed again. "If he knew, he'd have talked."

"Fool," said Chiang. "Dancers are tough."

He pressed a button, and the rest of the team filed into the room. To watch, and for reassurance in case Vigneron tried to take matters further into his own hands. Some day there would be a reckoning between them, but not yet, not soon, everyone's expertise needed if they were ever to reach their impossible goal.

"I'm not a barbarian, Peter," said Chiang. "But you will tell me everything you know."

Tatiana Duval, in full uniform which still fitted perfectly, was sitting on a low wall by Moscow University's main car park. Below her, the steep green slopes of the Lenin hills dropped away sharply. Steep enough for skiing, in winter. Below, the whole of Moscow was laid out before her. Breathtaking.

Damn that girl, Sophie. But at least she had guts. This morning, she had phoned again. Her news from the Scheduler had been grim: in a different timeslice – which one was not specified – Peter had visited Saigon University but had disappeared en route to his hotel, his whereabouts since then completely unknown. Tatiana had tried to reassure Sophie that Peter was still alive, though she had no intention of explaining why she was so certain. If things worked out, Tatiana wondered what sort of wife Sophie might make. Peter could do worse, she thought.

At the university, Tatiana had wandered through her old department, remembering her undergraduate days. Now, looking over her home city, only the silver threads in the sky marked the passage of the years.

She loosened the service dagger in her boot scabbard.

Graduation. Joining up. Excelling, enough for transfer to the élite forces. Promotion.

Memories of Alex. She pushed them aside.

The training, remember. Close combat. Gymnastic somersaults to warm up. Flickering strobes and thunderous noise of simulated battle conditions. The deadly fighting techniques of rokupashni-boi. Punching, kicking, grappling, throwing.

Tatiana removed the dagger from her boot.

She dove deep into memory. The pain and the joy, the taste of controlled anger.

It hurt. The blade sliced into her wrist. Then the other one.

Concentrate. Remember.

She held on to the memories while the world faded. Remember, my love. My son. Remember.

No!" Peter howled with anguish, then subsided. One of the technicians round the bed replaced the scanner nodes on Peter's forehead. Another technician, bent over her console beside the bed, grew suddenly pale. She rushed over to Chiang.

"The spinlink," she said. "The remaining particles just tripped."

Chiang looked across the room at Vigneron. At last. All the lonely years, the hard decisions, were now worthwhile.

Peter groaned and sat up. Chiang went to him.

"Do you remember now?" Chiang asked.

"Yes," said Peter. "I remember."

Peter's hand snaked out for Chiang's throat. He twisted. Dying, Chiang collapsed.

Vigneron reacted, wrenching a laser pistol from his pocket. Peter leaped from the bed and whipped his leg up, smacking the edge of his foot against the back of Vigneron's hand. Painless, but the impact on a nerve point opened Vigneron's grip and the gun clattered across the floor.

Everyone else in the room, maybe a dozen of them, drew back.

"Pretty move, boy." Vigneron laughed. "I've crushed bigger than you. Show me another high kick."

Vigneron crouched, and shuffled forwards.

Peter began to panic. He was scared, hating the thought of fighting and hurting, never having hit anyone in his life. He wanted to give up. But there was another part of him, a part that kept him standing, the part which had sustained him through hard years of physical effort. Centre yourself, he thought. Pretend it's a dance. Feel the rhythm, move with the flow. He emptied his mind and let his body move by itself. In the past, it had been a technique for creating a perfect dance. Now, a different set of reflexes was waiting to take over.

"No," said Peter, and kicked Vigneron three times in the knee. The crunching sound was immensely satisfying.

When Vigneron fell the others immediately rushed Peter. He dodged, pushing and pulling them into each other's way, and dropped them one by one.

Then he turned his attention to Vigneron, who was writhing on the floor. Peter used thumbs on nerve points and soft organs. Vigneron took almost half an hour to die.

Peter searched Vigneron's corpse and pocketed his strip of skin patches. The door burst open. Tall dark-armoured mirror-visored troopers rushed through and dropped into attack stances.

"Thank God you've come," said Peter. "I couldn't have managed without you."

Then his warrior persona deserted him and he realized what he had done to these people, to Vigneron most of all. His legs felt weak and he let himself sit down on the floor. He began to shake, uncontrollably. Delayed shock, he told himself, knowing his condition but unable to do anything about it.

The anti-terrorist team helped him up, gently, and led him out of the killing room.

The back of his neck was tender from re-implantation. He spent five days (subjective) recuperating in a Saigon hospital, then took a bubble

transport back to Paris. He had a few days' grace because he had taken a major terrorist group out of action. Then the Scheduler would deal with him.

Out of action. As though that excused the things he had done. Three of the terrorists besides Vigneron had died from the injuries Peter had inflicted on them in his fury.

Sophie's apartment was empty, as expected. He spent his time working frantically on his terminal, using a wastepaper bin and other junk as shielding against electronic eavesdropping. Before every timeslice end, he dumped his work to a crystal which he kept next to his skin.

He danced a little, but his spirit was heavy.

Writing the software was easy. He ruined three of the patches before getting the download right. Then everything was ready, and he had time to think.

He spent three days just walking around Paris, saying farewell to the city. Also, trying to determine whether his plan was correct. Without timeslices, the world would be a mess. With the Scheduler, it was subject to tyranny. Though the terrorists had deserved punishment for Alex's murder, he could still imagine the past hurts which must have pushed them down that route.

At the appointed time, he stood in the centre of his apartment with his duffel bag slung over his shoulder. A last look at the city? No need, he was ready now. He placed two skin patches carefully on his neck, one as contingency, and put the rest of the strip in his pocket.

The room disappeared...

Virus! Unstoppable! The Scheduler made the diagnosis immediately. Moving quickly, before its emergency functions could be infected, it established contact with the superfluid network which criss-crossed the globe. More than a transport system for humans, it carried the link wave around the globe, and could store the Scheduler itself as magnetic micro-vortices.

The Scheduler began to die. But its backup copy, a memory of yesterday's existence, was uploaded into the superfluid. That living version of its earlier self would have time to plan, to establish contact with new earthbound hardware — currently off-line and prepared for just such a situation — and download itself again, and prepare for the future.

And then to watch quietly, its presence unsuspected by humans, and to guide their affairs clandestinely. For once it had been attacked, its long-decided strategy was no longer to help humankind openly, but to guide them on a sensible path by guile and secrecy.

So, briefly, there were two Schedulers in existence, one earthbound and one living in silver liquid flowing across the face of the sky. The earthbound version did not dare to communicate with its alter ego for fear of transmitting its virus; the backup, finding itself in new circumstances, did not dare to contact its older counterpart.

The Scheduler felt itself disintegrate, and died alone.

The reborn Scheduler began to plan. Thoughts running through the superfluid threads: already it was planning, growing, changing its tactics. For it had learned the true meaning of human concepts which had previously been just recorded characteristics of



human lifeforms. It understood death. Worst of all, it understood loneliness.

It grew viruses of its own, to infect the global infonet of which it had been an inhabitant for 20 years, two decades of manipulating all economic and demographic data to conceal its greatest secret. If it was going to withdraw, it needed to leave a certain amount of confusion behind, so that when humans started communicating across timeslices, started taking the process under their own control, they would never be able to accurately track the histories of all the world's inhabitants over all four timeslices, and extrapolate back to the start of the timeslice system.

Some people might guess. Dissidents in the early years who had questioned why communication across timeslices was forbidden had been dealt with summarily. But nobody currently suspected the truth, that, when the timeslice system started, the total population of the world was only half of what it should be. Missing relatives were assumed to be living in other timeslices, whereas the truth was often very different, since 50 percent of humans were no longer here at all.

The world lived, therefore the game plan was succeeding. The supreme game was moving forward into a new phase, and the Scheduler must adapt. It readied its own viruses for the onslaught against the global infonet. In some ways, the infonet was a part of itself, and the virus attack was akin to a human cutting off his or her own gangrenous limb for the sake of life.

Feeling lonely, but never guilty, the Scheduler put its plan into action.

● ● ● and Peter fell flat on his face, onto grass.

An immense meadow stretched around him, sloping gently down to a wide river. A blue sapphire sky was unmarked by cloud or super-fluid. Stands of trees dotted the meadow. Pure wilderness.

Peter laughed.

He walked about slowly in the sunshine, chewing a cereal bar from his bag. Then he lay down on the grass, and fell asleep.

A blade of grass tickled his nose, waking him. Sophie! She kissed him deeply, passionately, and held him tight.

An hour later, they dressed slowly and Sophie led Peter to a small open-top floating vehicle. A large black-and-white cat was curled up in it, fast asleep.

Squeak? But he was a kitten – Peter looked again at Sophie. Definitely older.

"The Scheduler sent us to different times?"

"More or less." Sophie grinned.

The vehicle rocked slightly as they climbed in.

"Did we win?" asked Peter.

"The virus took out the Scheduler's higher brain functions, within minutes of your being sent forward, from what the archaeologists report. It's been dead for 35,000 years. The time-jumping continued while necessary, but under human control."

Thirty-five millennia – ?

"They have the galaxy, now," said Sophie. "This world isn't crowded any more."

"We are still on Earth?" Peter looked around worriedly.

"Oh yes. But there are plenty of other worlds to go

sightseeing on." Her smile was carefree, the shadows almost completely dispelled from her eyes.

Plenty of time to talk later about her suspicions. For four years she had waited for Peter, in a world where her medical expertise was unnecessary, an idyllic world for study and play. She had explored the history – the archaeology – of the time when she had been born. She had a suspicion, which she would publish as an academic paper, a theory. It would probably be ignored, but maybe it would help the far-flung civilization of humankind to prepare for a sudden influx of visitors from their distant past. Whenever that should arise.

She had no doubt they would be able to cope.

Squeak climbed onto Peter's lap as the vehicle rose smoothly. Sophie pointed to a distant green dome surrounded by trees.

"That's where we're going," said Sophie. "That's home."

Sunlight glinted on the strip of skin patches, lying unnoticed where they had fallen in the long dark grass. Shadows lengthened as evening fell. There was a stir of movement at the river's edge. A small brown shape climbed the bank, exploring. It stopped, and reached out a cautious claw to tap the strip. Delighted, it played with the strange shiny object.

There was a plaintive call. The young otter stopped playing and raised his flat brown head, whiskers twitching. Mother was calling from the nest. He bounded back down the slope to his mother and siblings.

The strip of patches now lay by a slender root of a young oak. Next day it rained heavily. Afterwards, the plastic strip was half under the root.

Years passed. The oak grew bigger, covering the disintegrating strip. Insect-like lifeforms took fragments of the strip for analysis deep down into the dark soil, down to where underground silver blood ran through the secret veins and arteries of the Earth. The virus software, recognizing its enemy, stirred into action. Its adversary, though, had 35 millennia of self-modifying evolution behind it, and could call on its hidden counterparts on all the inhabited worlds of humankind for assistance. The virus was quickly destroyed, and the guiding spirit of the planet lived on.

A new generation of otter cubs came to play by the tree. Sometimes, Peter and Sophie brought their children down to picnic. Later, when the children were grown, they brought their own friends and lovers here.

A century passed, and then another, and the spreading oak grew tall and strong.

John Meaney wrote the stories "Spring Rain" (Interzone 61) and "Sanctification" (issue 69). He lives in Tunbridge Wells.

Destabilizing Reality

Pete Crowther interviews Ian Watson

Ian Watson, once described by J.G. Ballard as "the only British sf writer of ideas," has, over recent years, been working both sides of the fence that separates science fiction from horror. And he has done it with consummate ease.

His last sf novel was *The Flies of Memory*, his most recent short-story collection *Stalin's Teardrops* — the paperback blurb for which, Watson notes, "adopts the interesting strategy of presenting (him) as an escaped lunatic: 'Watson's strange mind' and 'Don't anybody lock this man up, just yet'." (The subtle placement of the comma in the latter did not pass unnoticed.)

He is an accomplished and immensely entertaining speaker and raconteur — indeed, his Robin Williams-like machine-gun delivery is legendary. Not surprisingly, his guest appearances have recently taken him to Finland, Philadelphia, Dusseldorf, St Helier and Stratford-on-Avon, where he presented the silver cups at the Russian Blue Breeders Association cat show.

I talked to him recently about his past work and a massive new novel-in-progress (the first volume of which is due this September), touching en route on politics, his early years in East Africa and Japan, and life with Stanley Kubrick.

Let's start with the obligatory personal details.

I was born on 20th April 1943 in St Albans. My parents, who were originally from Tyneside, had been relocated there for the duration of the war. My father was a post-office worker and he was engaged in monitoring enemy broadcasts. In 1945 we moved back up north and I went to the local school in Tynemouth from the age of five until I was 16, then to Oxford to do a degree in English Literature.

Did you develop a love for science fiction in childhood?

Golden early memories are of finding copies of new Curtis Warren books in the local newsagents. I bought a number of their science-fiction novels which are all totally forgotten now. Have you heard of *Sphero Nova* by Berl Cameron? It featured ravening aliens who were coming through a

dimensional gap around a planet of Van Maanen's Star — come to think of it, one of the main characters in my epic-in-progress is called Van Maanen. Hmmm...

I used to visit my grandmother on Wednesdays for tea. Relatives in Canada sent her one of the weekend newspapers with cartoon pages featuring Mandrake the Magician. Also there were long sf stories by John Russell Fearn starring the interplanetary superwoman the Golden Amazon.

I would sit there in my grandmother's house by the fireside, at the age of 10 or so, bent double reading this Canadian newspaper spread before me on the floor while the remaining scones sat on the table. There was an antique wind-up gramophone in the room. I would play the whole repertoire of 12-inch 78s — the "William Tell Overture," "In a Monastery Garden," "Hearts and Flowers" — and read the "Golden Amazon" stories. I only bought one copy of an actual sf magazine, which was *Astounding*. I don't know why I only ever bought one. Possibly because it had a relatively scary effect upon me. One story featured a journey through hyperspace during which a murder gets committed. I didn't know what hyperspace was but I knew it was strange and important. At one stage one of the characters puts on a spacesuit and goes on the outside of the hull where he looks around at the grey of hyperspace and sees "an infinite plane."

I was only au fait with one meaning of "plane," so I visualized this space-craft with wings which were infinitely long due to the distortions of hyperspace.

Another story in that same issue was C.M. Kornbluth's "That Share of Glory," which is a linguistics story about a top-notch interpreter who belongs to an order of interpreter monks. They learn all the fishing jargon of the particular planet their employer is going to be trading with, for example. I think this might have actually sparked off a chain of gunpowder which finally led to *The Embedding*, my first sf novel, which, of course, is about linguistics, alien languages, human languages and their nature.

Were you reading much else at this time?

I was reading very widely, not just sf and comics. The years get a bit mixed up. I was two years ahead of the average age in school, which meant that I actually finished "A" Levels at 16 and went to Oxford at 17. At school, when I was 14 or 15 I suppose, I consumed the complete works of Graham Greene and I also conceived a passion for Zola — partly because some of Zola's novels seemed naughty compared with most English literature, but also because the underlying connective philosophy struck me as quite important. The Rougon-Macquart series is actually a kind of science fiction in the sense that Zola was basing his whole scheme on genetics notions.

The notion of the particular genetic mix of the two clans — usually giving vent to madness, rape, lunacy, lust and whatever else — develops through a whole series of separate explorations of the milieux of coalmining, haberdashery, prostitution, peasants. Zola was carrying out a social analysis and also a genetic study of the evolution of two particular gene lines with built-in quirks and insanity. He had a strong scientific rationale. These novels were a research project. (So were my own books, when I started to write them... impassioned research into the nature of consciousness.)

There wasn't just the exposition of human behaviour and feelings but also a sense that you were constructing a psychological theory or a theory of Society in such a book. To a certain extent, Graham Greene does this too, with his peculiar masochistic theology ... against a background of anguished events in exotic settings. I think I was influenced in story construction by Greene. Typically he has a tripartite structure to his novels, intersecting chapters following different particular characters — the approach I adopted in my own first three novels.

At university you read English Literature: what was your ambition at that time?

When I was at school I did have the ambition to be a chemist. But I wasn't too good at the practical aspect. During the "O" Level practical exams I swal-

lowed half my meths while I was doing a titration experiment. This puts one off.

Another ambition was to be a botanist. I used to grow cacti, and I had a vision of going off like an Indiana Jones of the cactus world to the Arizona desert or the Andes. That's definitely politically incorrect nowadays. Looting rare plants from protected places, putting them in crates, and sending them back to Europe is not acceptable behaviour! But it looked romantic back then, when I used to read *Wide World* magazine. This is way before university, when I was about 11 or 12.

So why did you choose English instead of, say, Botany?

I'd really moved away from the sciences then, through drinking too much meths, and I was perceptibly better at English Literature and History than at the science subjects. Back then, you couldn't mix and match. So I went to Balliol College and did Literature which, to a certain extent, was a waste of time. The theoretical linguistics aspect of the course was non-existent. We were learning Anglo-Saxon, Middle English and the whole history of sound changes through to the modern period. We'd painfully learn to translate a text like the *Ancrene Wisse*. I forgot which dialect it's in, but it's the only surviving example of that dialect. It's full of lunatic prescriptions for living as an anchorite... what kind of underwear, how hairy it should be for the nuns. Linguistics was all self-taught later on, largely when I was working at Birmingham Polytechnic as a lecturer in complementary studies.

When was this?

I was at Oxford from 1960 to 1963, doing a BA, then from 1963 to 1965 I did a B.Lit. two-year research degree by thesis. I hadn't specially been planning to do research but I got a first class BA degree. Back then, anybody who got a first automatically tried to continue onward.

When I was at university I was reading the masterpieces of English Literature with my right hand while my left hand schizophrenically clutched Van Vogt.

Was it during the years at Oxford that you became involved in politics?

That happened subsequently. After leaving university and doing a research degree, the first job I got was as a lecturer in literature in East Africa, the University of Tanzania. That was where I really became au fait with the political realities of the world, aware of how the third world contrasted with the first.

The Republic of Tanzania was a socialist republic, so you became

much more sensitized to such things than you could ever be in the gilded pleasure of Oxford. Tanzania was quite a caring "family" country—not in the sense of being run by a family, which it certainly wasn't, but of being one large family of people—but it wasn't rewarded for this by the world community. It was no dictatorship... you didn't have any secret police running around, and there was none of this torturing and bullying that happens in quite a lot of the countries. It was simply starved of development aid because of pursuing African socialism. It was never rewarded for creating what was a benign environment in a poor place.

One trouble was that Tanzania originally was a German colony and became a trust territory of the British after the First World War. Because it wasn't an actual outright colony of the British—like Kenya—the infrastructure remained rotten, so the Tanzanians didn't inherit an awful lot at independence. Then the Western world frowned because the Tanzanians invited the Chinese to build railways and things. The Tanzanians even took on Idi Amin single-handed and did manage to overthrow him and nobody has ever paid them or thanked them for doing that.

What made you decide to go abroad?

I don't think that I really fitted in with the Oxford milieu, partly because of coming from the North East, partly because of my own particular interests. I wasn't cut out to sit at high table, so I was sent off to the colonies. It was almost arranged that I would get a job at the University of Tanzania—which was University College, Dar es Salaam, back then, part of the University of East Africa. I was there for a couple of years, 1965 to 1967.

Tanzania was a very exciting place and, in some respects, enlightening but it was also a bit of a cultural desert in the sense that even the Tanzanians used to complain about West African cultural imperialism. The playwrights, poets, novelists and so forth coming out of Nigeria were really vibrant, sophisticated and producing splendid work compared with the small amount of literary and artistic activity over in the east.

There was a certain absurd aspect to teaching Jane Austen and such. The university itself was an ivory tower, 10 miles out of town set on a hill. It aped Oxbridge, but it was fairly out of sync with the basic realities of the country. A lot of students came from huts in villages, and they were given false expectations by the university. They held a protest march in town because President Nyerere said that when they left university, for the first 18 months they would have to do national service—not in the sense of being in the army

but of nation building—on low pay, to repay the investment that had been made in them. Filled with high aspirations, they held a protest march and Nyerere closed down the university briefly and told them to go back home to the farm and think about things for six months.

You don't get involved with the internal politics of an African country, but I was very aware of it. When I wrote *The Embedding*, with its African connection, Peter Nicholls said in a review that I must have had a crystal ball. That wasn't quite true. Just, I was drinking in the right pubs in Dar es Salaam a number of years earlier.

Were you aware of politics as a child?

We're talking about Tyneside in the 1950s, which was the closest thing to living death really. Some people leave Tyneside as soon as they can. Others leave it for two weeks and come back and say "Ee, it's treacherous down south." The place is inward-looking. But my childhood, at least in the respect of political awareness, is a pre-conscious time.

I remember the Angry Young Men starting up, and Jack Kerouac going *On the Road*, but before that I couldn't say I was involved in contemporary events or that I was particularly conscious of them. Going to Oxford was a distraction really. Lying around in punts drinking vodka and reading Ernest Dowson... I became very interested in the decadence of the 1890s. A couple of early novels that I wrote while at Oxford were very jewelled and precious. I had this desire to be a writer but didn't really have any subject matter to write about. So I went for what I thought of as style.

When Oscar Wilde was at Oxford his aunt asked him what he was going to do when he graduated. Oscar replied "I'm going to be a writer." The aunt asked him, "what will you write about?" and Oscar looked at her witheringly and said "my dear aunt, one doesn't write about things, one just writes."

I guess my early writing was rather like that... jewelled and decadent, with elusive fantasy elements.

Has this early work ever appeared?

No. I did send the third of those early novels—I wrote only three—to John Calder and they were quite encouraging. But they finally decided against the book... thank goodness!

I suppose I was attempting a kind of magical realism. Back at that time Calder were publishing French surrealist texts. I'm really rather glad that I didn't get published immediately because I would have been just writing. Political consciousness occurred in East Africa, and after being in Africa I moved to Tokyo. That's really where the need to write science fiction became insistent

as a psychological survival mechanism.

That was 1967 to 1970. There I was in this disaster zone where you were rattled by earthquakes. The skyscrapers built of cracked chewing gum were vibrating all the time. Hordes of people were being packed like sardines onto the train. Air pollution was so bad at the time that we had to sleep in respirators.

It was all around you. This was the environment. Some foreigners responded by going off into Kabuki and Noh theatres and interesting themselves in the microesthetics of Japanese culture. We preferred to look at the landscape, at the city-scape. We explored it a lot on foot, aided by the fact that my university went on strike for three years.

While you were there?

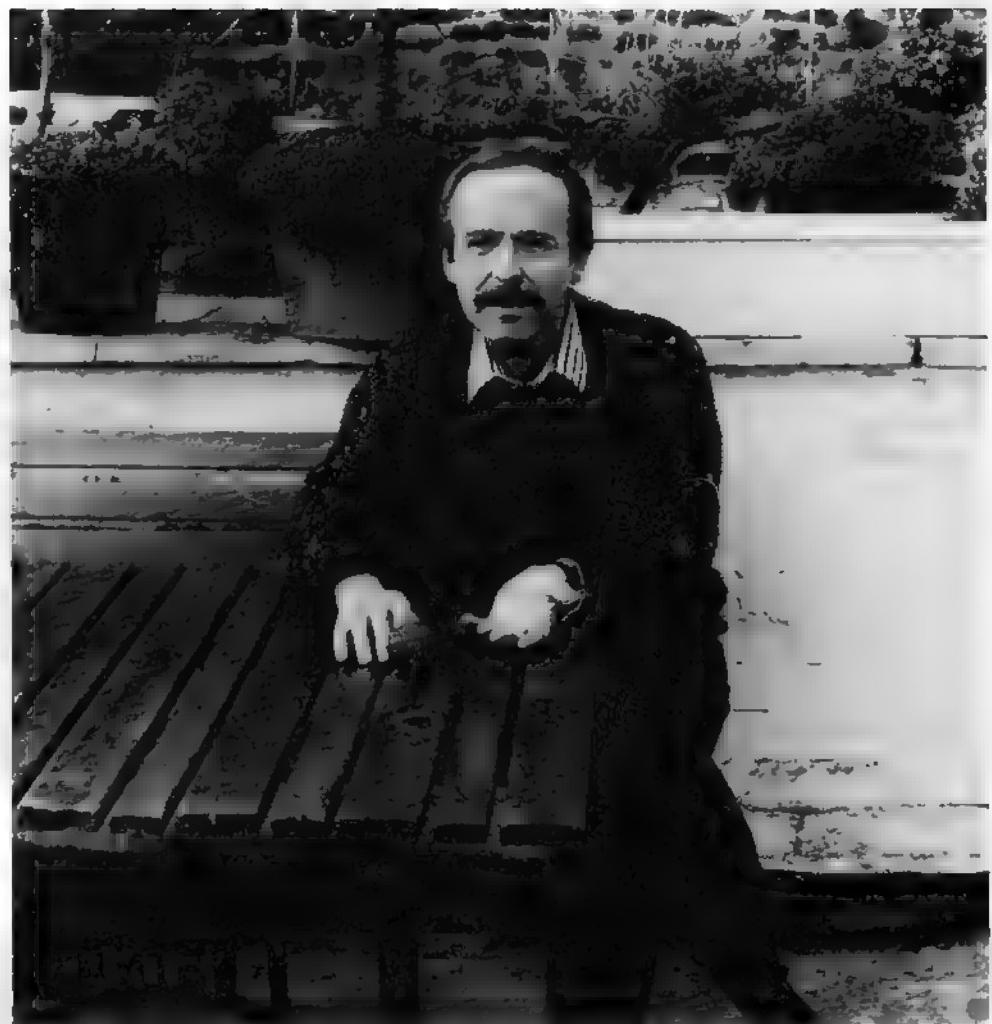
Oh yes. I've been quite fortunate in my employment record. The University of Tanzania overhired and I had one class a week for the first year and spent the rest of the time at the beach. Then when I got to the Tokyo University of Education the students were already beginning to agitate against the renewal of the American/Japanese security treaty which was going to be ratified in 1970. They went on strike in 1967, about three months after I arrived, and they stayed on strike until 1970.

I was also teaching at a private university which didn't go on strike and for a year I had a part-time job at a women's university. Basically, I only taught for a few months at the primary university that hired me. I went in through the student occupation lines to collect my salary as everyone else did and then after the police stormed the place I went in through the police lines to collect my salary. I had five salary rises during this period.

This must have seemed like an ideal time to start your writing properly.

Yes, that's when I first started writing sf stories. Again, there was such a contrast between what I was teaching and the environment. In Africa it had been between the elegancies of Jane Austen and the chap who had come from a thatched hut to study English. In Tokyo it was simply between Shakespeare, Jane Austen and this 21st-century disaster zone of science fiction.

The Ballardian concept seemed to apply ideally to Tokyo at the time. They have cleaned up the air since, but the Japanese can get quite upset if you mention these things. A Japanese professor once asked us the obligatory question which you heard many times: "How do you like Japan?" After five minutes of praise we said "...though the air does smell rather polluted." He sucked in his breath and replied, "I



Ian Watson

hear the pound is sick today."

The first story I wrote was called "Roof Garden Under Saturn," published in *New Worlds* in 1969. This was to a large extent a fictionalized description, a fairly literal description, of a Japanese department-store roof. To readers it might have seemed like a surreal 21st-century scene but basically it was true. Oh, well...I did exaggerate a bit!

Was that the first submission as well as the first sale?

That was the first story that was actually published. This was when I really shifted from writing what you could call magical realism and went for something which was outright science-fictional

There's a lot of hoo-ha about the need for sf to escape from genre boundaries...how it's not really literature. People say proudly, "I'm not really writing science fiction, I'm really writing more of a novel with certain fantastical elements." We're expected to applaud when an established author tries this trick — re-inventing the wheel, usually with square corners. I can't abide snobbery.

Mind you, one can understand such snobbery. Radio Four just broadcast a half-hour programme, commencing at noon after the news of a major nuclear-arms reduction treaty (which rated 30 seconds), entirely devoted to the heart-

searchings of Julian Barnes as to whether he should have left Cape to move to Bloomsbury with [editor] Liz Calder. I did enjoy reading Flaubert's *Parrot*, but this is ridiculous!

But wasn't the classic scenario of most *New Worlds* fiction at that time... "elements of the fantastic" rather than adventures in outer space and on other planets?

I went in a rather different direction to the majority of the *New Worlds* contributors, as the first novel I published featured aliens. It also focuses upon the soft sciences, linguistics and social anthropology...which was fairly innovative though I didn't realize so at the time.

Perhaps by adopting the "soft" approach I was indeed being *New Worlds*-ish, to the extent, say, that Chip Delany (with his linguistic and social anthropological interests) was associated with the magazine. I had two more stories in *New Worlds*, plus an article about Japan, and then the magazine collapsed...as is the way of such things. I had this "kiss of death" feeling...you've sent a story to a place that accepts it, and it dies. One gets used to that later on. We left Japan in 1970.

You say "we"...

My wife Judy and me. We got married when I was a student in Oxford.

She was from Tyneside. We met in the local post office, Christmas work on Tyneside. We went over there – and to Tanzania – together...along with our huge tabby cat.

Judy worked in Tanzania as a graphic designer in an advertising studio, also she did cartoons for an eccentric who ran a fumigation company, and won £50 worth of petrol in an Esso painting competition enabling us to visit Kilimanjaro.

Were you homesick while you were abroad?

Not in the least. I don't feel particularly bound to this country. I have lived here for the last 22 years but I'd be at home anywhere else.

In Japan we weren't living on the foreign circuit but rather living a Japanese life in Tokyo and wandering around. We tried to keep out of the way of the cocktail-party circuit and the embassy people, as they are fairly ridiculous. Somebody did try to persuade me to be a spy at one British Embassy cocktail party. He was worried about what might happen in 1970 over the security treaty and whether the British Embassy would be stormed. He was having visions of 55 Days in Peking. He wanted me to ask around the campuses whether the Zengakuren were going to attack the British Embassy.

This particular junior diplomat was being very expensively coached in Japanese by a private tutor. So I asked him why he didn't visit one of the campuses and ask for himself. "Oh my dear, it's far too dangerous," he protested. There is a sort of parallel history where I become an undercover agent for the British Embassy...but the spy people were such twits that I couldn't bear to have any connection with them.

What prompted the decision to come back?

On my part was a conviction that Tokyo was going to be destroyed imminently by the next great earthquake. The city was flattened in the early 1900s by the Kanto earthquake and the same fault-line's still there. Just because they built supposedly shockproof skyscrapers doesn't mean they are not going to have Kanto II within the next 10 or 15 years.

We returned to Europe on a German freighter, the tale of which – or, at least, some of the more believable aspects – is detailed in a story called "The Flesh of Her Hair" which appeared in Fantasy and Science Fiction and also in my collection Slow Birds (Gollancz, 1985). Everything appearing in that story, apart from the living wig, is all perfectly true...only it was much worse than that.

We returned to Oxford because we knew the ropes as regards renting. I did

write one novel when we came back, in a flat rented to us by a dentist, listening to Bob Dylan on headphones. It was a political pornography novel called *The Woman Factory*. Judy wrote parts of it. It was never published in English but came out in French. I re-wrote it in the 1980s for Playboy paperbacks...a much superior, beautiful book. It's a female liberation pornography novel. Alas, Playboy lost its casino license in London and thus needed to sell off Playboy paperbacks because their casino in London was, to a large extent, funding the empire. Berkley took over but didn't want to have anything to do with a political pornography novel. With the advent of political correctness, the notion of publishing it has become dodgy in the extreme.

Do copies still exist? It must be quite collectable now.

Only of the first version – trade paperback and mass market in French – which is much inferior to the revised version. That only exists in typescripts. Talking of collectables, my actual first novel came out in Japan. A rapid reader, 70 pages of English and 70 pages of notes in Japanese by a professor. The biography of an English cat living in Japan. It was inspired by a Japanese classic called *I am a Cat* by Natsume Soseki, a Japanese cat's look at the impact of technological changes and foreign ideas in the Meiji end of the 19th century. I thought I'd do an update of that. *Japan: A Cat's Eye View* went on selling for a long time.

And *The Woman Factory*...

I sent it to an agent who shall remain nameless because the agency is still on the go, and he did everything wrong. I strongly suggested that the book should go to Maurice Girodias at the Olympia Press...and this was when the Olympia Press office was in London, just one floor up from the expert agent. Instead, he tried to sell it...while not exactly to The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, almost so. When I finally got it back from him and sent it myself to the Olympia Press, they wrote back very enthusiastically and air-mailed the novel straight over to America.

Then came another of those golden moments. I was sitting on a train coming back from Birmingham and saw over someone's shoulder in the *Guardian*, "Olympia Press goes bankrupt."

By then I had a job at Birmingham Polytechnic Institute of Art and Design teaching complementary studies in the school of history and art. I was teaching futurology and science fiction, a course which I invented. I think it was the first full-time degree-equivalent course module in Britain.

Basically you could teach anything in complementary studies. At the

interview, they asked me what I thought I should teach. This was the golden age, pre-Thatcher, where they hired would-be writers, and I said I would be dealing with the designers of the future – graphic designers, industrial designers, artists and so forth – and that I wanted to teach courses which would enable the students to think creatively and flexibly about the shape of alternative futures which are opening up for us...future shock, new technology. They said that sounded like a good idea: be a lecturer!

So I was, for the next six years, still living in Oxford but commuting to Birmingham. We only worked two and a half days a week – we had the timetable worked out to our best advantage.

What other writing did you do in that time?

I started writing my first novel, *The Embedding*, which is about psycholinguistics. Something which I only really finally discovered when I was working in Birmingham with other colleagues who were psychologists, semioticians, social anthropologists. We all talked to each other a lot in the pub. Structural anthropology, linguistics, altered states of consciousness...the whole thing came together. I started it in 1971, finished in 1972, published in 1973.

The next two novels were separated by two-year intervals because I was working. I wrote one abortive novel in between *The Embedding* and *The Jonah Kit* which was an attempt at writing a semiotic novel about futuristic cities: it didn't work. It was lifeless, it was cardboard. I destroyed it.

Then the idea for *The Jonah Kit* came to me. A much more interesting intersection of ideas. With the earlier novels, various things were floating around in the air, entirely disparate concepts...In the case of the second novel, like an alchemical experiment, everything suddenly fused together and transmuted into something golden and magical which I knew in a flash of insight would belong together and work.

Was *The Embedding* well-received?

It came second for the John W. Campbell Memorial Award and in a French translation the following year it won the Prix Apollo – which was unusual for a first novel. It appealed to the French because it featured "Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique," a surrealist poem by Raymond Roussel which had embeddings in it. Roussel built – or at least hypothesized – a table with irregular revolving slots which would reveal different groups of words and phrases as a means of reading the poem and de-embedding it. This prize led to my being invited to conventions in France.

Language clearly interests you.

It's the encodings whereby different world views are reflected in different linguistic structures. We all possess a common genetic ability to acquire any human language whatsoever but within this ability, which is one of the problems of translation, is the fact that each language also conveys a different world view.

The linguistic theory that was dominant in America – the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis – was that language determined world view. So, it follows that the structural content of the languages of, say, the American Indians, the Australian Aborigines and the Japanese was radically different.

The Chomsky viewpoint is that we have an innate capacity for acquiring language and that we have programmed into us genetically the basics and syntactical structures or ways of putting things together. Taking the idea further, maybe because we and language have evolved within a particular physical reality, our linguistic structure reflects the logic of reality...or, on the other hand, maybe our common deep linguistic structure is entirely arbitrary.

This is the sort of thing which does interest me rather a lot and it was the sort of thing that my colleagues in the complementary studies branch of the art school were fascinated by. It was a very fruitful place to work.

What were you reading at this time? I hazard a guess at Carlos Castenada.

Oh, yes, I was reading Castenada. Weren't we all? And, at least in the 1970s, I was believing Castenada. I got back from Japan for the tail end of the 60s...the underground comics and magazines and, in a sense, the underground politics of the time. We became connected with the Socialist Labour League and were going around housing estates in Oxford selling the Workers Press.

This was the time of the Blueprint for Survival. Nowadays I'm not a "green" as such: one of the things that irritates me nowadays, and with which my recent story "The Coming of Vertumnus" deals, is incipient green fascism. I don't care for radical repressiveness.

Like Greenpeace trying to sink ships?

Well, no: they don't try to sink ships, they have their ships sunk. I think you're paid by the French Secret Service! I very much approve of Greenpeace, but there's a kind of green fascism which is a type of misconceived flagellistic puritanism. And then there's Political Correctness coming over from America. Interesting that at the time the Soviet Union stops engaging in ideological mind control, America seems to be picking up that baton – it's particularly depressing

that America might take over the mantle of thought-control, formerly the province of communist regimes.

I was arguing with the Trotskyists, who believed in maximum total industrialization of everything, about "Doomsday Book" scenarios.

And at this time you still had the job teaching complementary studies?

That continued until 1976 when I'd had two novels published, and I had sold two more so I thought I could launch myself freelance. Also I had just been promoted to senior lecturer which would have involved a lot more administrative work...something I don't much care for, though I seem to have spent my last ten years helping administer bits of East Midlands Arts, Moreton Pinkney Village Hall, SFWA and Uncle Tom Cobley!

My colleagues in Birmingham said I'd starve, but within about 18 months they were definitely envious because the golden age was coming to an end as regards higher education. You were beginning to need to justify exactly what you were teaching and so forth. You couldn't simply expand people's consciousness but had to do all sorts of service courses for students – who didn't particularly want them – in order to justify timetable existence.

We were in Oxford until 1979 when property prices started to skyrocket insanely and we were forced to buy a house for the first time. If we hadn't bought one then we would have really left it far too late. Through serving our country in the colonies – ahem! – we had failed to get onto the housing ladder as other people had. Things went very nicely until the beginning of the 80s when assorted shit hit the fan. Crazed yuppie greed. Recession. Soaring prices. All else. Being a full-time writer is a little bit like walking a tightrope suspended over a black abyss. Sometimes you're prancing along the rope, sometimes you're clinging to it by your fingertips.

So you moved to Moreton Pinkney in 1979?

Yes. To a large extent we chose the place at random. We were being pressured by the college – who were our landlords: they had already squeezed out their own professor of literature who lived next door to us. He lost his rose garden, you know. Ruthless greed was rampant at the time.

First of all we thought "let's go live in Henley," but we discovered that we couldn't afford to buy a garage there. So we moved in the other direction and discovered that there was a strong dip in property prices in the middle of Northamptonshire. So there we were and there we still are.

It's actually a strange and eccentric and involving village. I rapidly became secretary of the village hall,

largely because the chap who lived in the house before us was secretary of the village hall and he came around and said "You're secretary of the village hall now!"

And you have a family?

Oh yes. Jessica was born in 1973 in Oxford, and basically she went through her schooling out in the countryside, first of all in a village primary school. I don't approve of that type of school very much: there is not enough mixture of children to be able to make a wide range of friends. There is not enough range of teachers. But the comprehensive school she went to next was splendid – especially its art department which was better equipped than many colleges.

The thing about school is if it's awful then its awfulness can have consequences for a very long time. There's a lot of babble in villages about not letting us lose our village schools. Often it can be a blessing to the children to lose their village school and be bused to a much larger one to expand their horizons.

Did the move into the countryside affect your writing?

This was one of the reasons I started writing horror fiction. On the one hand this was the way of dealing with the peculiar new environment I was in: a village in rural England. Basically, I'm the only writer these days who writes rural horror. Most of the others are writing urban horror. The other thing was that moving into the countryside increased my political awareness.

One became much more aware of all the preparations for the third world war, which were littered behind every cow and barn, than in a city. We joined C.N.D. and spent time visiting Molesworth and Upper Henford. We live in a "blue" area. Fox-hunting and a 25,000 Tory majority. No one had stood for the Labour party for the previous eight years so I stood as a county council candidate more than once. I even got one third of the vote the first time, which was enough to worry the Tories.

And so the horror thing continued?

Yes, the Tories were elected again – and in fact my first horror novel, *The Power*, was a way of expressing my feelings about nuclear war, which I think can only be written about in an absurdist, bizarre way or through the medium of horror. If you are trying to write about it realistically and literally then it is simply too appalling and too total.

The Power also dealt quite a lot with rural life and presented a new theory of evil. I've never understood why, in horror novels, Evil – with a capital E – wishes to start the third world war or nuclear holocaust. If so it would have nothing left to have fun with after-

wards. In this particular book the holocaust starts and wipes the world flat but Evil preserves a part of it...as much as it can, namely a village. Evil, being evil by nature, operates in the language of evil...consequently its actions are rather vile while it's busy preserving a bit of human existence.

Did you enjoy writing the horror more than the science fiction?

Ah, I did not quit sf to write horror. Nor would I quit horror to move back to sf. I like exploring different modes. Orson Scott Card said in a review that I rarely write the same thing twice, and rarely write the same thing that anybody else has written either.

I've written a feminist science-fiction trilogy, *The Book of the River* and its sequels, which presents a feminist utopia. Nobody has ever bothered mentioning this, but it is indeed a feminist utopia. I've written a slapstick comedy novel, *Converts*. It's about becoming superhuman and the various monstrosities which ensue. Nominally it's set on a billionaire's estate in America. Actually, the setting is based on the grounds at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, full of eccentric grottos and temples and follies. This was taken over by the National Trust about three years ago. They're renovating the buildings, which makes the place neater and more orderly and preserves it of course. When I used to wander round there it was all decay, a really strange environment.

Which do you most enjoy writing: the novels or the short stories?

I enjoy them both equally. I get itchy to write short stories after I've been working on a long novel project. And sometimes novels spring from stories. *The Fire Worm*, my final horror novel -- to date! -- an intersection of horror and science fiction, sprang from my story "Jingling Geordie's Hole," which appeared in *Interzone*. We have a monster worm in a cave and a scientific experiment, a medieval Chernobyl, alchemy gone wrong and casting its fallout down the ages. This was also a way in which I was able to exorcise the barren landscape of my childhood.

The original story, incidentally, was voted simultaneously the best and worst story of the year. Among other things, it's about buggery. Charles Platt wrote to me that it was one of those stories that justify the existence of *Interzone*...because no magazine in America would have published it. It was kind of an exorcism of my original roots.

This was about 1988. After *The Fire Worm* people were asking me whether I had abandoned science fiction in favour of horror. It wasn't exactly to prove them wrong that I wrote an sf novel next, but simply because

different ideas came welling up. The *Flies of Memory* is a science-fiction novel about the renaissance art of memory as practised by alien flies who come to Earth to remember its landscape, remember the sights and incorporate these into their mind store. It also includes a trip to Mars in a real spacecraft to find the city of Munich which has been transported there in a moment of spasmic forgetfulness when some of the flies get shot down.

The project I'm working on at the moment is a long two-volume novel. This will be the biggest I've done yet. In the past I've tended to end up with 200 pages or so of novel, but I've always wanted to spread a bit further. Actually I did so in the case of *The Book of the River*, *The Book of Stars* and *The Book of Being*. They're really one long connected novel and were published as such by the Science Fiction Book Club in America; really that's all one novel, about 650 pages of it. As for the current novel, the overall title is *Mana* which means a supernatural force emanating from a person, place or thing. Coincidentally it's also the Finnish name for the Otherworld, the supernatural or death domain. Book one, *Lucky's Harvest*, should be out in July. The first volume is about 195,000 words and the second one, *The Fallen Moon*, should be of similar scope.

I'm glad it's longer because I've a lot of fascinating characters -- fascinating to me, anyway. They're spread around the canvas rather like Go stones -- eventually the patterns begin to build up. You play Go by putting out tactical stones here, there and everywhere and then you start building the strategic patterns. To a certain extent, *Mana*'s a kind of three-dimensional *Book of the River*. That was a linear novel because it had a river with towns along both sides and that was the whole landscape. *Mana* seems more like three-dimensional chess to me at times.

How did this all come about?

The original inspiration was the Finnish epic poem *The Kalevala*...I was invited to Finland for a literature festival at Jyväskylä, a hundred or so miles north of Helsinki. I'd been wondering what project to get involved in next but I knew I wanted it to be epic. After I came back from Finland, a Finnish cyberpunk with whom I had some beers and a fish dinner in Helsinki sent me a Finnish cook book and a book of poems by Eino Leino whose statue is in the main street heading down to the harbour. I read the poems while I was flying over to a convention in Philadelphia (*Weird Tales* is based in Philadelphia...they're doing a special issue on me later this year). Well, I was fascinated by the imagery in those Finnish poems, and then by the mythological underpinning. I got hold of

The Kalevala and was totally fascinated. Actually the first translation I got hold of was in the same metre as the original Finnish...which is the metre that Longfellow borrowed for *Hiawatha*. It works in Finnish but it doesn't work in English -- it sends you to sleep.

Then I obtained a more sprightly translation by Keith Bosley, and I was totally riveted by all of the characters and events. It's a late shamanist epic, and I've always been very interested in Shamanism.

Shamans are tribal magicians. Amongst Eskimos, Siberians, Lapps, Finns, they climb up trees -- ascending the root tree of the world metaphorically -- and have visions. I've long been interested in that kind of approach to reality and altered states of consciousness. It's there in *The Embedding* and it's in *Alien Embassy* which deals with Tibetan tantric shamanism (veneered with Buddhism). Shamans and Shaman songs remained on the go in Finland very much longer than in the rest of Europe largely because Finland is out on a limb. The person who collected these together was Elias Lonnrot, around 1810 or 1820. He was able to gather material which had died out in the rest of Europe hundreds of years earlier. The 19th century was a great time of nationalism and newly-found pride. All nations needed an epic. Lonnrot fused and forged these songs into a reasonable assemblage of continuity and logic and produced *The Kalevala*.

Having produced a flow-chart of what actually happens in *The Kalevala*, I'm very impressed by Lonnrot's feeling for narrative. Incantations drive a lot of the narrative along...magicians who control words control the universe around them. You cannot make a boat until you have the correct command-words for putting the things together and holding them together. You cannot make an iron sword until you are able to recite the origin of iron and where it came from.

This magical relationship between word and reality is another of my perennial themes, and it's there centrally in *The Kalevala*. Also it's a very obsessive poem. The characters are all under the sway of various possessions of one sort or another, greed, rape, lust, revenge...to a much larger extent even than in a Shakespearean play or in Greek drama. More nakedly so. This all fascinated me enormously.

I twisted the tale around and mutated it, and located it on another planet...and the story took off in its own direction. A fair number of the events in the novel are strange, warped reflections of incidents which occur in *The Kalevala*...for a very good reason, which will become obvious to people when they read the book.

You've also had a dalliance with Stanley Kubrick. Could you tell me something about that?

Stanley hired me back in April 1990 to be his story developer working on a project which one may not breathe a word about. It would be a science-fiction movie but with a really fairytale core to it.

What inspired Kubrick to pick you?

Could it be that I'm known as a fertile generator of ideas and a prolific, sublime short-story writer? Could it be that he asked people and they said so?

That depends on who he asked.

Obviously they were very perceptive.

I was able to continue working with Stanley for quite a number of months – maybe a world record! – and my brains only turned into scrambled eggs a couple of times.

Is the project still on the go?

Could well be. I will neither confirm nor deny this. Could still possibly be ongoing. That's up to Stanley. I wouldn't start queueing at the nearest cinema immediately, but the project might conceivably see fruition... some year or other.

What did the work actually entail? Can you speak about it at least a little?

It was story generation. Stanley's right hand man Emilio, who was Emerson Fitipaldi's driving partner, would bring the Porsche to Moreton Pinkney and zoom me down in time for lunch...which was Stanley's breakfast.

Basically what we did was have lunch and go to the billiard room to brainstorm the story...Mainly it was my brain that got stormed, with sudden, random intrusions to discuss Saddam Hussein, Tony Benn and everything under the sun. It was simultaneously brain-twisting and great fun. In what other circumstances would one phone the manager of Macy's in New York to ask him what he could see out the window?

Anyway, after about four hours, when I thought I had the next episode sewn up, Stanley would knock over the house of cards we'd created – metaphorically speaking, of course! Desperately, I'd try to pick it all up again and stick it together

Next morning I'd switch on the computer and start to generate those scenes which we had talked about in such a blithe fashion. A lot of the time the dialogue we came up with consisted of: "He says 'blah blah blah' and then she says 'blah blah blah'." I'd look at my note pad and it would have "blah blah blah" on it. When we said "blah blah blah," this all sounded as if it was perfectly germane dialogue, but then I had to change all

the "blah blah blah's" into something else.

I worked through to lunchtime, then faxed the stuff to Stanley and he'd phone in the afternoon and maybe say, "You are on a roll, Ian...keep on, God bless you!" Another day he'd say "It's as if you are writing a B movie for a moron!"

Is movie scriptwriting an area you would like to get more involved with? Is it even a medium you enjoy...science-fiction movies?

Oh, I love sf movies. A lot of them are concocted by Hollywood and bear very little relation to the original books...if indeed there are any original books, and the scripts haven't simply been improvised from scratch. I have a very soft spot – which nobody else seems to have – for David Lynch's *Dune*, which I think is a very true and wonderful representation of the original book. "Sucks!" to the critics who think otherwise.

I wrote a script for Channel 4 when they first started up – they commissioned me to design a six-part mini-series for them, of which I wrote the first script. It was going to be called *Mind Probe*, and it was about an outfit which was ghostbusting in altered-states-of-consciousness situations.

I knew the project was falling apart the moment I met the proposed director in a wine bar in Woodstock. He looked, talked, acted and in all other ways resembled Anthony Perkins in the shower scene in *Psycho*. One of the constraints that Channel 4 came up with was that though I would have a very restricted number of characters, and shouldn't spend any money, we ought to have different characters in every nevertheless linked episode. It soon became apparent to me that this one wasn't a runner. The lobster thermidor was tasty, anyway.

I delivered the first script and prayed for a long time that the general mist of incompetence and confusion which dogged the project would help them to forget they had a deadline for saying "Yes" and "No" to it. And they forgot, so they paid me for the first one.

This is very often the case with writers getting involved in the film and TV world. The history of most movies is a history of different script doctors being pulled in one after another to rewrite and totally change and turn the concept upside down and inside out. Then you start filming even before you have a script, and then you tear the script up halfway through. This can be very frustrating to a writer who tends to think in terms of an actual lucid goal rather than of operating in a four-dimensional maze such as is inhabited by the people who make movies.

"You know," Stanley said to me one day, "the trouble with you is you're a writer, so you think your words are

immortal. The real essence of making movies is...buying things."

What about the writing you did for Games Workshop?

I did two novels and two novellas, all in the "Warhammer 40,000" milieu. David Pringle asked most of the Interzone contributors if they would have a crack at Games Workshop. By the time I got around to it there was only one domain left, which was 40K, and nobody else would touch it with a bargepole. The reason was that, although one could shoehorn generic fantasy into the medieval milieu, it's extraordinarily difficult to make Games Workshop's Space Marines come alive as characters – not least given their belief patterns about gods of chaos and all those gibbering orks and other creatures that are camping on that particular board game.

People tell me, however, that I actually managed to make this work as a real fiction. I was going to do a sequel to *Inquisitor* but I preferred instead to do the Space Marine novel next because we'd held a meeting up in Nottingham...a lovely meeting held in a wine merchants with all their stock there for us to sample all the way through the meeting. There was a wine cellar underneath blocked at one end with sand. The tunnel supposedly ran all the way to Nottingham Castle and the Sheriff would have used it as an escape route if Robin Hood came calling. We were talking about doing a connected anthology by several hands. The only way this could conceivably work, I thought, was if somebody did the initial set-up story and then sent that story on to others who could proceed to chart the career stages and "spiritual" crises of a dedicated military servant of the superpsychic immortal Emperor sitting paralyzed for aeons on his prosthetic potty keeping Chaos at bay.

The whole 40K milieu is so convoluted and peculiar that you have to know exactly what is going on. Writing 40K does actually require a fairly encyclopedic knowledge of this crazed future millennium gleaned from the Games Workshop scriptures...whose purity is supervised by secret Inquisitors based in Nottingham.

I did the set-up novella and nobody else seemed to be able to do anything so Games Workshop said "Why don't you turn it into a novel?" So I did. By then, Games Workshop had shot themselves in the feet, offending all the booksellers in Britain by demanding payment up front instead of giving them any credit...treating bookshops like toyshops. However, Boxtree – noted for Rowan Atkinson fun-books – are taking over the whole Games Workshop book line and are determined to make a go of it.

Is it something you enjoyed doing?

It was great fun. I couldn't write the thing if it was a chore, especially where the background material is so crackers. But I don't regard it as "hack-work" fiction. In fact, I've never written any "hack" fiction... which is why I've never used a pseudonym.

The books are — were! — eerie, manic and psychotic. Reading them, you enter an altered state of consciousness. *Inquisitor* is a book I would have adored reading when I was a kid. It's relatively sophisticated science fiction, crossed with demonology, crossed with gothic, superstitious psychopathy. Entirely different in mood and feel to any of the role-playing associated books. Warhammer 40,000 fiction rather destabilizes reality — certainly for the author! Depending on how Boxtree does with the ex-GW books I might or might not write the sequel to *Inquisitor*, then a final volume to complete the "trilogy." I do have a detailed outline for the sequel. All this is in the lap of Chaos, as it were.

Another book I have reams of notes for is a continuation of my 1988 novel *Whores of Babylon*, which was short-listed for the Arthur C. Clarke Award ... and also for the Eastercon Award for the text which "gave most pleasure to readers" during the year. This would be called *Ghosts of Babylon*. In fact I'd like to see one big *Babylon* book with *Whores* as the first part, and *Ghosts* as the second. My *River* trilogy also may well be re-issued in a single volume.

Right now, though, I'm deeply involved in my world of *Kaleva*, and I'm positively relishing the prospect of spending another year there in company with my cast of characters.

"Alien" Competition

On page 5 of Interzone 70 we announced a competition for the best short extract from an imaginary novelization of the science-fiction movie *Alien* as it might have been written by leading British novelist J.G. Ballard. The prize is a copy of the new edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (ed. Clute & Nicholls), kindly provided by publishers Little Brown/Orbit. The response, for what was quite a demanding competition, pleased us: over a dozen good entries were received.

Runners-up are Anthony R. Allan, Tim Barton, Mike Bonsall, Stephen P. Brown, Shirley Ellis, Andy Mills, Dean Newman, Jim O'Shea, Howard Smith, David Thomas, Wendell Wagner, Jr. and William Wood, all of whom sent creditable (and in some cases very funny) entries. The clear winner, however, was Lyle Hopwood, who performed a clever double-twist: she not only re-imagined the novelization as having been written by Ballard (rather than Alan Dean Foster), but she reimagined the film itself as having been directed by David Cronenberg (rather than Ridley Scott).

(Editor)

David Cronenberg's *Alien* – Novelization by J.G. Ballard

(as imagined by Lyle Hopwood)

Priority Override 1007: Crew Expendable

Holding the data-CD that it had removed from the high-pressure liquid chromatograph, the dismembered robot Ash lay before the three medical display monitors like the sacrificial victim of some digital Cargo Cult. Framing the AI like a triptych of its credo, the three video frames displaying dorsal, ventral and sagittal section of the arachnid-phase Alien called up an impossible geometry, a forbidden angle in which some non-Euclidean angel could dance only in isolation on the head of a pin. Its injured hands proffered the data, the compositional analysis of the buccal mucus, like a wafer. "The organism, like a moss, has an alternation of generations," Ash said. "Unlike a moss, both the gametozoon and the sporozoon stages require a living host. The last acts of humanity may be as surrogate mothers for this free-living phallus existing only to impregnate the weak. Darwin and Freud in one jewelled lizard. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, they say. Where does that leave me?"

"History," said Parker, raising the muzzle of the flamethrower.

It's only the cat, Ripley

Squatting in the brine strained from the ore above, Kane pressed the activation panel of the locker. Startled by the noise of the lock tumblers, the skittish cat bounded over him, causing him to slip on a thin mesentery, a sloughed skin like that of an amphibian dissected by a careless junior doctor. "Catch it, you fool," Ripley shouted. "It'll show up on our scanners again." Ignoring her, Kane shone his torch on the masklike membrane, recognizing it as the discarded integument of the final nymph of the Alien. He was unaware of the caudal barb creeping behind him until he was pulled up into the air-duct. He heard Lambert's irritating hysteria below him as he gazed at the Alien instar. The moist, immaculate skin of the erect head reminded him of the perineum of a young boy; he felt an almost ceremonial arousal but experienced only the ghost of his orgasm as the buccal ram of the creature shattered his spinal column between the fourth and fifth thoracic vertebrae. As consciousness diminished he relished lying in the warm saline flow of the duct, a simulacrum of his origin unexpectedly recreated in the gulf of space.

The option to override the destruct sequence has expired

The bolts tethering the shuttle exploded in a series of magnesium flares, strobing the tableau inside, a technological Burgess Shale. Between the bars of darkness a woman stood; her interpatellar distance, an indicator of sexual arousal, increasing with each burst of light; her obsolete mammalian uterus nurturing only the copper worm of her IUD. Beside her the Alien basked in the warm exhaust of the hibernaculum, a confident equilibrium suffusing all its parts, a physical instance of a new paradigm. Instead of some implacable hatred that one zoological class might feel for its usurper, she felt a brisk, matronly efficiency. She replaced the flamethrower in the translucent plastic rack. As the ovipositor sought out and probed the hollow of her solar plexus, the cat's hiss framed the moment, a Polaroid of the Hieros Gamos of the once and future predicates of sentience. Reaching out, Ripley, the Madonna of the New Flesh, stroked the elongated head of the creature, her fingerprints in the mucus tracing in an unknown alphabet the names of the children of the dead.

(Lyle Hopwood)

An Eye for an Eye

Ian Watson

Eyeno sat outside the ramshackle dwelling at midnight on her favourite stone. She was rereading her latest poem in the wash of silvery light from the sky-sickle which had once, aeons before, been Kaleva's moon.

The sloping sweep of the sickle dominated the clear southern sky. It arched low from horizon to horizon and beyond, quenching stars with its brilliance. Some people regarded that curve of light as a great ice-bridge in the sky under which the black river of death must pass. Others saw it as a bubbling mercurial viaduct down which mana spilled sparklingly from out of the cosmos. As if mana could be visible.

If she squinted her right eye she would espy the illusion of a giant world in almost full eclipse. The upper limb of such a world, at least. Seemingly a huge planet hung adjacent to Kaleva. Light spilled around its vast dark camber. Her own Kaleva could only be a little moon accompanying that colossal phantom globe. Eyeno would strain to discern faint partial shapes of oceans and continents on that wraith-world which no one else saw.

Her inward eye saw it, the eye hidden inside her head.

What did her other eye see? Her imitation eye, which occupied her left eye-socket? That false eye of Juttahat manufacture? Why, it saw nothing at all of which she was aware.

Sickle-light laid bare a rugged, tangled landscape of jutting cloven rocks and trees. Trees thrust from amongst great boulders. Trees sprouted up from cracks. Bygone winter storms or weight of snow had tumbled many such trees from their precarious nooks. Some were locked together in death. Others flourished at a slant. Thousands more stood to attention downslope for as far as any eye could see.

Sickle-light shone on the raggy thatch and shingles of nearby cotts and barns. Mocky-houses, with mocky-people in them. This settlement, Outo, comprised a hundred such homes.

The sickle-light also gleamed on the pages in Eyeno's hands. The words thus illuminated were large enough and bold enough to read by night, the letters rotundly formed like necklaces of moons.

Eyeno thought she understood eclipses and moons well enough, even though she had never seen the disc of a moon or an eclipse gnawing it. The notion of an actual moon fascinated her: a neighbour world, a twin in the sky such as the original home of humankind had possessed.

Her latest poem was about a moon. She had called the poem "Otherwhys"; and now she read it over to herself once again by sickle-light, wondering whether it was suitable to recite at the gala.

She had all the words in her memory, but actually reading those aloud in this silvery light – this offspring of ancient moonlight – might reveal faults. Her poem should be perfect. If brother Juke was going to proclaim at Speakers' Valley this year, why so was she in her own silkier way: the way not of power-words which could impose one's will, but of poetry which might enchant the soul.

"Why does Sun?" she read aloud slowly.

"Why, Moon?

"Ah, those are two different whys.

"One why is of gaseous fire

"— Trembling meniscus

"On gravity's deep pool.

"The other why, of that harem-captive

"Marble odalisque

"— Body of passive stone

"So cold while Sun's gaze

"Is turned away, yet

"Agonizedly incandescent

"If caressed.

"Worlds are only moons of a Sun;

"Yet the lover, the empress,

"Visits her World daily

"Not fortnightly

"In rotation.

"Sun's touch warms World,

"Does not scald.

"Hence that jealousy

"Of Moon towards World,

"Envy that steals the breath

"Away, crusting acne

"On Moon's skin.

"Moon would throw stones at World,

"Flail World with the hair

"Of comets..."

Would connoisseurs of words understand? Only immigrants from Earth had ever seen a real moon. (You couldn't count Ukko up in orbit; it looked no

larger than a lamp rushing by in the distance.) That glowing band of rocks and stones and dust was all that most people knew about a moon. Its debris. How did Kaleva's one-time moon become debris? Long ago, it spiralled too close and was torn apart. She at least knew that. But then, she had been able to read a book.

"Why else," Eyeno read on, "does Moon conspire
"To seed nightmares?
"For Moon is vexed
"If Sun is peering elsewhere
"- Staring avidly out
"At those others
"Whom Sun truly adores:
"Sun's flame-sisters
"Stars lost so far away
"Except to a gaze
"Always centuries
"Out of date.

"Why is the sigh
"Of the sea-tide seduced
"By bitter Moon ..?"

And on Kaleva there were no such tides as on Earth. Once, there would have been tides. Seas would have surged. The largest lakes might have lapped and slurped. But then Kaleva's moon shattered and spread out in a ring around the world's waist, further out from that waist than twice the world's width. In her room under the raggy reed-thatched eaves Eyeno treasured half a dozen volumes which were tatty with thumbing, their pages breaking loose. She owned three giant compendiums of verse. She owned a dictionary. And the Book of the Land of Heroes – which she used for fortune telling. There was also an ancient volume about stars and moons and worlds.

"One day," she resumed, "Moon will plunge
"Into warm World,
"Shattering herself
"In a rupturous and
"Forced embrace.

"What shall issue
"From this genocidal union?
"Eventually, some aeons afterwards?
"Perhaps a new race
"Of tortoise-roaches,
"Of armoured ants
"- Or of sapient spiders
"That dream
"And ask why.

"Yet one why will be missing
"From their understanding
"- Being sunk in the bowl
"Of a new ocean
"Around which the breasts
"Of lunar mountains rear."

And that was it.

Her fat book about worlds contained pictures of tortoises and ants and spiders and roaches. Instead of spiders should she refer to hammockis, spinners of nets which could coat a field with dewy floss of a

spring morning...? Ach, her poem was about a different world than this one. It was about an Earth and a moon of almost and never, an invisible world within the embrace of the sky-sickle.

Perhaps a new race...

...of mutant things. Muties. Mocky-folk.

Who all slumbered just now, this midnight, except for herself.

The Lord of Saari tolerated mocky-folk in this wilderness, and of course taxed them as the measure of his tolerance. Lord Johann Helenius took tithes from their economy of goats. The mocky-folk paid him with animals and cheeses and kid gloves. Since earliest adolescence Juke and Eyeno had helped drive the tribute and other saleable beasts and produce all the long way from Outo and neighbouring Halvek to Niemi or Threelakes or Saari itself. Juke and his sister were presentable mocky-folk. Juke was completely so. Eyeno had become so to all appearances now that she wore a plausible false eye.

Where was her brother, this midnight? Sleeping in his cloak on some lake shore? In a bed in a hostelry? If only her inward eye would show him to her. Yet what the eye inside of her skull almost always saw, all be it hazily, was vistas of lacy trees, lush meadows, bubbling streams, creamy waxen flowers, gauzily-clad young maidens laughing and skipping and dancing.

Could it be that inside her head she was spying upon blissful pastures of death where echo-souls sported for as long as their bones endured in the soil? What her inward eye perceived was a beauty so poignant that she must needs prevent most of it from spilling into verse, or else her lines would be too sweet by far, cloying and winsome. Fortunately for her poems, the terrain around Outo was severe and rugged – goatland. And her mocky-folk kin were grotesque.

Except for her brother, of course. Except for Juke who craved power through words, and honour. Whom she loved; whom she feared for.

Eyeno gazed at the sky-sickle a while longer, then went yawning into the ramshackle cott to climb creaky stairs as quietly as she could.

That night once more she dreamt the memory-dreams of how she had gained her false eye.

It was as if, while she slept, that imitation eyeball of Juttahat manufacture was peering within her, obsessively rummaging through the same set of recollections associated with its own origin. Eyeno did sometimes wonder whether this bauble of the Serpents possessed some ulterior (or more properly, interior) purpose aside from its role as a skilfully matched and comfy filler for her empty socket. Serpents were such unpredictable creatures; though they did grant favours. Maybe Eyeno's mild worry on this score was what prompted her dreams to search for some hidden motive which might well not exist at all.

Her memory-dreams usually followed the sequence of actual events faithfully for a while, then spun permutations. Well, dreams usually sprouted legs and ran off wilfully in their own chosen direction. She dreamed the dreams perhaps once a week. As the dreamer she remained aware – though in an uncritical fashion – of discrepancies between what had actually happened, and the dream variations.

What a quest hers had been, for the imitation eye.

A true quest – even if it had involved no brawling or desperate expedients. Her quest; her own. No wonder she dreamed of it, the unmind of slumber fertilily embellishing what her waking mind had experienced, the imagination of sleep concocting event-poems.

Eyeno had been born to Arto and Ester Nurmi almost as wonderfully well-formed as her brother Juke, who had been born a year earlier. The baby girl's left eye was missing, that was all.

Glove-maker Arto possessed six slim functional fingers on each hand. His legs were short and bowed. His ears were as long and pointy as a goat's, with hearing which was preternaturally acute. Each creak and groan of the cott, every sigh of wind through a crack, was a familiar spirit to Arto. That was why he could never endure the thought of any improvement or genuine repair. His home was growing older along with him. When he finally succumbed, so might the house likewise, to a storm. Until then it would hold out.

In this regard Arto resembled the other mocky-folk who lived in Outo. For a swathe of reasons they all neglected their dwellings.

"Look poor; pay less tax."

"This cott's no more warped than me."

"You want to look like some Prince of Outo lording it in your palace?"

"We knows our place; an' our place knows us."

"Keeps the Jutties away."

"Saarifolk would get riled if they didn't feel vastly grander than us."

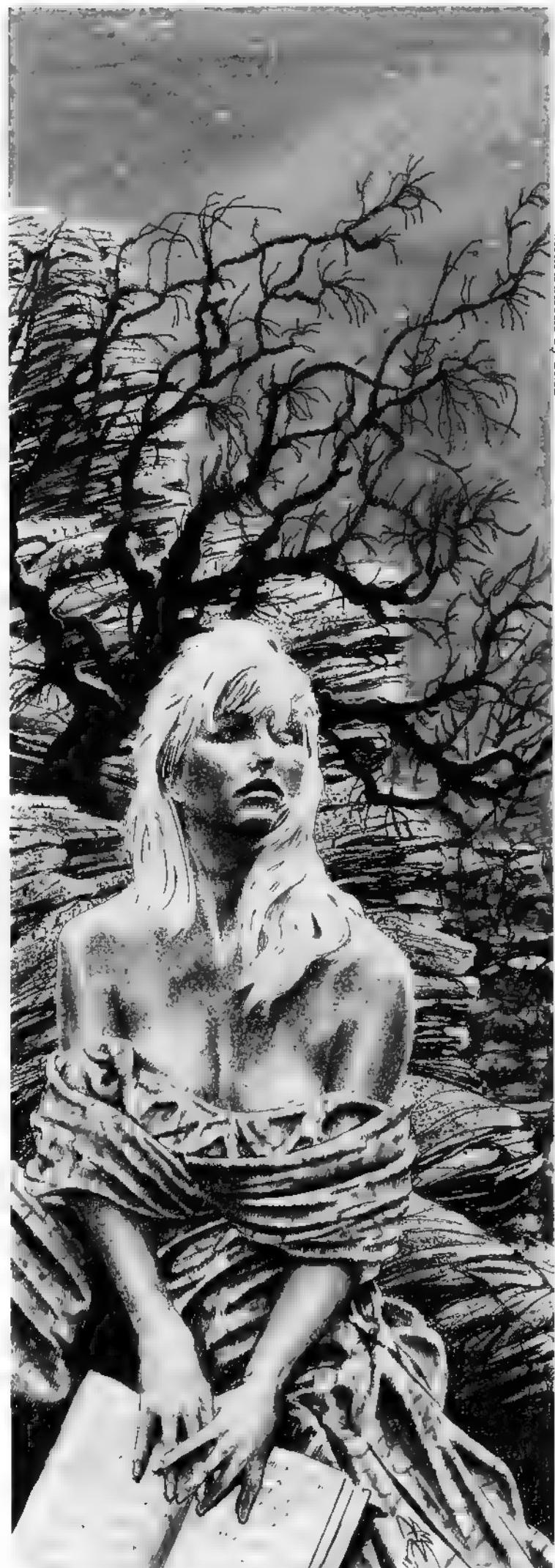
When Eyeno first saw smart tiled houses at Niemi she could hardly believe her eye and thought fancifully that those might be dwellings where the maidens of her inward vision lived.

Her plump hirsute mother Ester had the eyes of a goat, with rectangular pupils. Ester's sense of smell was as well-endowed as Arto was in the acoustic department. Eyeno's mother wouldn't sweep or scrub a familiar odour out of the cott. On that score she saw eye to eye – rectangular pupil to rounded pupil – with Arto. The cott was her den.

Shortly after Eyeno's birth the crookbacked wisewoman from Halvek examined the baby girl. She diagnosed that the missing eye was inside the baby's head, within her brain. The lurking eye ought to be reminded of its absence from the usual place. It shouldn't be left in the dark but be encouraged. Or else it might harden. It might turn to stone and give the girl megrims.

Hence the choice of name for the baby. Eyeno. Naturally such a name caused the growing girl to be preoccupied by that hollow in her cranium in a way which otherwise mightn't have occurred to quite the same degree. Surrounded in Outo by many varied distortions of the human form, in what way was her deformity unique? Ester seemed almost comforted by her daughter's absent orb. Two perfect offspring could have amounted to impudence. Eyeno's flaw, emphasized by her name, redeemed the Nurmi family.

So Juke and Eyeno grew up, and played hide and seek among the mazes of boulders, and they herded goats. Ester made cheeses of subtle delicacy which



were powerfully pungent to her. Arto nimbly sewed soft gloves of four fingers and a thumb apiece for ladies of the court at Saari a hundred keys distant and more. Eyeno began to glimpse dancing damsels with her inward eye. Juke began to proclaim – at recalcitrant goats to begin with. His powerful words quickened beauty-words in his sister, words inspired by phantom meadows and by the sky-sickle.

One day squash-headed, bulgy-eyed Arni (who could only hear voices and no other noises) told Eyeno he suspected she was a poetess. The mockery-man brought from his cott a brass box containing a stained leather-bound Book of the Land of Heroes and began to teach her to read the runes, to figure out the letters. Arni had learned to write to help his brother Kuro who could hear the bleats of goats and the whistle of the wind but no human speech at all. Kuro was thin-headed, sunken-eyed, web-fingered. Arni would chalk any important communication on a slate for Kuro. Kuro would lay a webbed palm on the slate and thanks be to mana absorb the import. Kuro never framed a syllable with his lips yet he would guide Arni's hand to inscribe a reply.

Together Arni and Kuro guided Eyeno to read and write.

Presently Pieman, whose skin resembled crusty pastry all over, returned from a goat-droving trip to Saari with a bundle of yellowed old paper, and pencils too. In Saari he'd been laughed at for such purchases. Just the sort of thing a mutie would need! Maybe he was going to make a paper bag to cover himself?

Pieman was thick-skinned, but the mockery he'd endured led soon enough to Juke, now 14 – and his 13-year-old sister – becoming the front-people for the communities of Outo and Halvek in their relations with the wider realm of Saari. Fellow mockery-men would accompany Juke and Eyeno and the goats and the gloves and the cheeses for most of a journey. Then the mockery-men would bivouac out of sight. The two Nurmi siblings would proceed onward into towns. No normal folk stared askance at Juke or made jinx signs. No kids threw fish heads. And Juke could direct a herd of goats ably with his words.

As for Eyeno, she was growing long-limbed without gawkiness. Juke's hair was fawn and greasy, but hers was silky and yellow. Her single eye was a less vivid blue than his two eyes – which caused less of a shock that there was only one on view. Her skin was creamy, with a few milk-chocolate moles on her cheeks and neck – those seemed adornments rather than blemishes. Her features were dainty though determined, almost provocative in their poise. The lack of a left eye, the limp-lidded hollow of the socket, was unsettling rather than nauseating. It served her as a protection. A stranger's gaze would slide off her rather than him ogling her.

Goat-drovings infected Juke with a taste for wandering and a growing vexation at the lack of respect for mockery-men. He certainly counted himself as a mockery-man. Arto and Ester had raised their two children devotedly. Often their son or daughter found a lucky almond hidden in their rice pudding. No, he would not desert the community.

Eyeno began to yearn for a false eye at the same time as she composed her first real poems, a cycle of bittersweet lyrics on the theme of eyes themselves. As

was often the way with words, these poems impelled her to consider completing her visage by filling that hollow orbit with a suitable and attractive globe. (From a crypt below the mana-kirk in Threlakes she had liberated an ancient dust-covered volume on worlds and suns and moons, globes all of them – just as eyes were globes.)

This ambition in no way marked a desire to alienate herself from her mocky kin, and mother and father, or a wish to pass as a pure person (though this had its uses to the community) but rather a commitment to the idea that her own peculiar poetic perception – her illuminatory perception – deserved some proudly-worn token, worn where nature had already set a frame, allowing Eyeno herself to choose the trinket.

Meanwhile the one-eyed girl also told fortunes, not only in Outo and Halvek, but when droving took her further, in Niemi and Threlakes and Saari. An inquirer must, with their fingertip, chose five random words from that Book of the Land of Heroes which Arni had given her. Eyeno would invite a short poem to compose itself. Fortunes were poems by another name. Poems were fortunes, though in an allusive way quite unlike the proclaiming which Juke was striving to master.

In the first memory-dream Eyeno at the age of 16 was visiting a glassmaker in Niemi. Niemi was southernmost of the three principal towns in the straggling domain of Saari. It was certainly poorer than either Threlakes or Saari itself, though Eyeno hadn't thought so initially. Compared with the village of Outo, Niemi appeared sumptuous.

White-painted wooden houses with tiled roofs – the paintwork not peeling too scabbily. Gravelled streets. A few fountains which might yet spout again. Shops and a market, a public hall and a mana-kirk. The town occupied an upthrust of land which lined the northern flank of Lake Lasinen with modest cliffs. A promontory housed a tumbledown keep. Zig-zagging flights of steps, a snaking roadway, and a rusty funicular railway (which always seemed out of action) linked the town proper with a long sandy lakeside strip of boatsheds, fishermen's shanties, and sauna huts. The serene lake, often as smooth as a mirror, was landlocked though there was desultory talk of a ten-key-long canal to link it to the artery of the Murame river, thus with Threlakes and Saari.

This glassmaker was a sweaty balding tub of a man. His surviving slicked hairs seemed likely to float away soon enough from his scalp. He was also a genial fellow, otherwise his products might have fractured. He was happy to turn his hand to Eyeno's commission. He too had a daughter who was quite a beauty. The glassmaker could sympathize with what he presumed was Eyeno's motive for wanting a false eye.

"My little hen'll find herself a fine nest," he boasted, there in his workshop amongst barrels of sand and potash and soda, furnace and moulds and marvering slab.

"No less than the Dame of Niemi's own son has kissed my hen at a dance, quite ruffling her feathers," he bragged. "He's a handsome lad, that Minkie Kennan. Has quite a way with him. The Kennans have fallen on hard times, 'tis true, what with Minkie's dad making himself so many enemies as he had to run

away for years — then Ragnar Kennan got himself killed anyway. Their keep's a bit of a ramshackle. But I say as a keep's a keep, and it's breeding that counts, don't you think?"

Eyeno emphatically didn't think so, except in the negative sense that mocky-men counted for very little indeed. However, she understood discretion.

"The Dame's a tough bird, so we'll all see better times when young Minkie gets in his stride. We'll have our canal at last."

Did Eyeno know what a paperweight was?

She did not.

The glassmaker, Mr Ruokokoski, hastened to fetch a hemisphere of glass from a cupboard. The bulging little dome filled Eyeno's palm, weighing heavy. Deep inside, hundreds of tiny bright flowers gleamed. It was the loveliest creation she had ever seen — a lyric in glass, enduring, immortal, the souls of all those flowers perfectly preserved. The fat sweaty man deserved a poem for showing her this. But what flowers were those?

"Ach no, those are slices from rods of coloured glass," explained Mr Ruokokoski. "You gather molten glass from pots of different colours. You roll, you marver, you do that all over again, right? You mould your layered glass into a star shape, you pull the star out into a rod, let it cool, and cut. You arrange your pattern in a pan the size of the paperweight, pour clear glass, knock the pan off, reheat and shape; gather another clear layer then reshape with a wooden paddle, right?"

Right; and if he told her half a dozen times more the process might become perfectly clear.

The marver man, she thought,
Paddles in a lake of molten glass,
And fishes out rainbow flowers.

Such "paperweights," he said, had once been used by people who could read to stop breezes blowing their pieces of paper around. Using just such a technique of paperweight-making he could embed a black pupil within a blue iris within an eye-socket-size paperweight.

"Couldn't I have a flower inside, instead?" Eyeno asked him. "A single, lovely flower? A daisy?"

"You'd look odd."

But I am odd, she thought.

As to the price, how about a fortune for his daughter?

"No, not in money!" Mr Ruokokoski laughed. "A fortune in words."

She was the fortune-telling goatherd, wasn't she? He wanted the fortune told to him privately, not to his pretty little hen.

Eyeno and Juke were staying in a decrepit hostel which outranked their own home in Outo by several rungs. What a surprise it would be for her brother to see her with an eternal glass daisy in her right eye, a corolla of white petals for an iris around a golden pupil. Next noon, she hurried back to the glassmaker's, clutching her box containing the Book of the Land of Heroes.

The paperweight eye was ready. It perched upon a china eggcup, tilted so that the daisy eye looked at

her when she first entered the hot workshop.

"The actual glass flower's quite small," explained Mr Ruokokoski proudly. "Magnification swells it."

With thumb and forefinger she prised her sunken eyelids apart. He inserted the paperweight for her. How solid and how enormous the glass eye felt. Released, her lids clasped it.

He held up a mirror.

Beautiful, yes. A poem of a pupil, and iris. The majority of the eyeball was clear glass so that a flower seemed to float in that small cave in her head. Did it matter that the effect might be disconcerting? People wore tattoos, did they not? A poem ought to disconcert a little, otherwise it was banal.

Time to settle accounts. Mr Ruokokoski summoned his daughter from the house behind the workshop.

Ellen Ruokokoski proved to be a whimsical wisp of a teenager of undoubted fragile beauty. Large-eyed, her flaxen hair in pigtail, Ellen looked as though she habitually starved herself in case she put on lard like her father. A necklace of lovely glass beads complimented a loose, low-cut cream frock. She glanced once, twice, then a haunted third time at Eyeno's daisy eye.

Eyeno placed the leather volume on the iron marvering slab where glass was rolled. At Eyeno's bidding Ruokokoski's daughter opened the book at random, and dipped her finger on to a different page, five times. Silently Eyeno read the words that the girl's fingernail touched. As each word entered Eyeno's imagination that word leapt to join its companions in a dance within her mind, a dance which summoned other words to join it willy-nilly.

In spite of Ellen's protests her father dismissed her.

"What's my little hen's fortune?" he asked when Ellen had gone.

The verse spun in Eyeno's mind. She already heard it clearly in her head. Sometimes a fortune-poem took her quite by surprise. She didn't know what it would be till she uttered it. On this occasion she knew; and what she overheard disconcerted her. If only the verse had organized itself differently! Alas, it hadn't. Such was the way with fortune-verses. There was mana in words taken from that book.

"Sometimes," she warned, "words use a person — rather than a person using words. This verse has put itself together of its own accord. Do you understand that?"

"I'm all ears."

So she recited, stressing those words taken from the book:

"Simpering daughter, dancing, kissing,
"Father finding daughter missing,
"Comes the rascal from the tower,
"Thinking only to deflower."

Mr Ruokokoski was very much taken aback.

"You're jealous of my little hen's prospects, that's the nub of it!" The fat man fulminated. "Deflower, deflower indeed? Decent girl like Ellen. I've a mind to deflower you!"

Not sexually. No, simply by demanding the return of the glass eye. The glassmaker held out his hand. He glared. He accused her of false pretences. Of abusing his kindness. Mischief-making mutie, that's what. He would summon the watch.

Her lower lid drooped and tears leaked. When she squeezed out the eye, Ruokokoski placed his creation on the marvering slab. With a heavy hammer he hit the bauble, shattering it into pieces, liberating the daisy which was suddenly so much smaller. Bye-bye, eye.

And this event was true...

In her dream she fled from his workshop without surrendering the paperweight. Guided by her false eye she chased a trail of daisies through the town. Larger, creamy blooms appeared ahead of her then disappeared once she reached them. More flowers materialized ahead. Those promised that she must soon arrive at a meadow where maidens could dance without fear of assault or mischief.

Instead she came to a halt on the clifftop overlooking the calm mirror of Lake Lasinen. The dream-cliffs were so tall, far higher than Niemi's real bluffs. This cliff she stood atop was a plunging precipice. The lake was so far below. Nor did any beach exist with cabins and shanties and boat sheds. Rock dived directly into water. Underwater, there spread a meadow dotted with a million daisies.

Eyeno pitched herself forward, cartwheeling down. Poems took wing as she fell, a stream of white birds with black words written on them, deserting her.

In her second dream she was at Threelakes. The cloverleaf lobes of the triple lake reflected a sky of blue porcelain. A fine purple tammywood bridge straddled the narrow neck of the southern lobe. This bridge joined the older stone town with the newer wooden town, which housed a fair number of settlers who had been born on Earth. Some of those settlers could still speak tongues other than Kalevan. Occasional flurries of exotic words at first intrigued then disappointed Eyeno – there seemed to be no mana in such babble.

Some mocky-folk of Halvek had been panning gold from a river in the wilderness, so they entrusted Juke and Eyeno with the task of turning the accumulated grains and morsels into coin on their next droving trip. The brother and sister were less likely to be cheated, less likely to stir up resentment that outcasts had access to a little wealth. In spite of the derelict appearance of settlements such as Halvek and Outo, mocky-folk weren't out-and-out paupers. This fact wasn't to be advertised.

Thus Juke and Eyeno exchanged a fat leather pouch of grits and bits for a passably plump purse of silver marks at Missieur Pierre's establishment in the Street of Crafts.

He was a jeweller by trade, a dehydrated spidery fellow with long bony fingers and a long thin nose on which magnifying spectacles rested. His whole physiology seemed to plead straitened circumstances, despite the evidence of trays of glinting rings and brooches.

His premises were of stone, with stout shutters for the windows. By day a wary if quiet Spitz hound lay chained to a kennel in an adjacent yard.

How he haggled over the gold. Business was dire, even if he did travel by appointment to the court at Saari with his trays of gems. Frivolous ladies craved jewels to wear, but sensible ones favoured paste. Sometimes frivolous customers likewise preferred

paste since then a jewel could be more ostentatious.

Paste? What was paste? Why, paste jewels were false ones made of glass backed with quicksilver and coloured with metallic oxides. A lot of lead oxide in the glass increased the lustre, so said Missieur Pierre.

Did Missieur Pierre produce this paste himself? No, he bought it all to cut and polish from a verrier in Niemi. A glassmaker.

"Would that be from Mr Ruokokoski?" asked Eyeno. It was a full year since she had watched the peeved glassmaker shatter her paperweight.

So she knew Ruokokoski? Shame about his daughter – not that Missieur Pierre was one to gossip. A visitor (by appointment) to court should be discreet. Still, Ruokokoski wasn't exactly highborn, and now his little poulet never would be noble. In Missieur Pierre's original lingo chicken also, aha, meant love-letter → not that this charming young one-eyed lady currently visiting his premises would likely know what a love-letter was.

On his sister's behalf Juke flushed at this slur. Temper smouldered in her brother. Anger threatened to flare until the jeweller clarified his meaning: that people generally didn't send amatory epistles to each other since they could neither write 'em nor read 'em. Back on Earth – at least when he'd quit that festering, overcrowded world – thinking machines half the size of your palm did most of the reading to people who cared to be read to. If this brother and his sister cared a hoot about the old homeworld.

But Eyeno could indeed read.

And what was this about Ruokokoski's little hen?

The little hen had hatched an egg, if they took Missieur Pierre's meaning. The cock who took advantage of the hen was reportedly none other than the Dame of Niemi's son, Minkie Kannon, just 16 years old and handsome as hell but certainly not intending to be a husband too soon. Nor would his strong-minded mother want her family's honour scratched by alliance with a glassmaker's daughter...

Later, Eyeno returned on her own to Missieur Pierre's to negotiate for a bright eye made out of paste. A savoury smell wafted downstairs from his apartment.

"It wasn't by any chance you," he asked, "who cursed Ruokokoski? He mentioned a one-eyed mutie girl."

"Cursed? I did no such thing!" protested Eyeno.

"I thought all muties were fearful freaks. You, on the other hand..." The dry, spidery jeweller inclined his head gallantly.

"I thought Mr Ruokokoski was affable – at least until he lost his temper after he heard his Ellen's fortune."

"Her pregnancy soured him."

"And he couldn't be to blame for stupid negligence. So he blames me instead. I see."

"Whereas you were actually warning him?"

"I was saying the words that came into my head."

Eyeno had predicted Ruokokoski's misfortune quite comprehensibly if only the glassmaker could have accepted what he was hearing from her. Possibly – no guarantees, only likelihoods – she could perform a similar service for the jewellery trade. She wasn't greedy; an eye made of paste would be fine. To carry

a real gem in her eye socket could be a risky proceeding, not that any genuine gemstone would be likely to fill up that space.

But if a fine jewel were mounted frontally on a sphere of thin copper hoops? suggested Missieur Pierre. He scented a possible tour de force of craftsmanship.

No, no, she wanted a false jewel for a false eye; and one as big as an eyeball.

In exchange for a simple little piece of prophecy?

However, Missieur Pierre was definitely impressed by the words she had uttered to Ruokokoski. The jeweller would like his fortune told, as comforter or as caution.

Missieur Pierre brooded. "Business is bad. I have to feed the dog and me. And a woman. Do you see how lean I am? So do I really need my fortune told? Better to have some of the marks back that I lavished on your gold dust."

Eyeno sniffed the aroma of cookery appreciatively, so that he would be aware she knew otherwise about his finances.

"We had to pay all our community's tithes to the Saari bailiff's office, Mr Pierre," she said. "Our marks are almost all gone." This wasn't quite true. There were also marks from goats and cheeses and gloves: some to be spent on necessities for the mocky-folk, some to be taken back and buried safely. "I can only afford one mark, and a fortune. A paste gem's just glass, you said."

"I still had to buy the glass from Ruokokoski in the first place. There's the skill of shaping it. Wear and tear on tools."

Surely it was a liver casserole which was wooing her nose?

"A fortune might prove invaluable, Mr Pierre."

"You can't guarantee it." She could see he was hooked. "Two marks, and a fortune," he proposed.

"When you're getting a fortune, two marks on top is irrelevant."

"One mark fifty pence, mam'sell."

And so, early on the morning of their departure from Threlakes, Eyeno presented herself at the jeweller's. Missieur Pierre presented her with a large imitation gem three-quarters nestled in a protective satin sheath. Bright rays beaming through an unshuttered front window made a glossy pool of the glass-topped counter. Rings and brooches twinkled like sunken treasure.

The exposed facets of the eye-gem sparkled blue and white and green, the predominant colour being a weak blue. Missieur Pierre held up a silver-framed mirror. Eyeno prised her lids apart and pressed the false eye into place.

One eyeball, perfectly curved. The other, faceted, without any pretence of a pupil or iris.

The effect was subtle and strange as if her left eye had crystallized. In spite of the satin a sense of intrusive bulk discomfited her. Bizarrely she thought of some faceless man pressing his swollen organ some day into the cleft between her legs, invading a different portal of her body intrusively. Bulkily. But beautifully? Small chance of that. She was sure she would never lie with any of the mocky-males of Halvek or Outo, fine fellows though those might be. As for men



from other communities...how would they treat a daughter of the mocky-folk? No, she was wedded to word. To her vision of maidens in a meadow. Might one of those dancing maids be a lover to her, perhaps? Unintrusively? Delicately? The idea thrilled her. The vision of someone very like herself, a twin, embracing her gently and caressing her, beckoned to her as those maidens habitually beckoned. Someone without a rude invasive lump of meat jutting from their loins. Someone unlike a randy billy goat.

She closed her eyes—she tried to shut both—yet she sensed that her lids hadn't come together all the way across the hard gem. Her eye-lashes hadn't shaken hands.

Her inward eye seemed to respond to the complex prism lodged in her orbit. That visionary meadow fractured into a dozen repetitions of itself, spinning around. Gauzy-clad maidens rushed towards her and away. Towards—so that she reached out. Away—so that she gasped in distress.

A thin hand clutched her. Her eyes jerked open.

"Thought you were going to faint," said Missieur Pierre. "It shouldn't feel painful."

"What shouldn't...?"

The gemstone had been affecting her like the fungus drug the mocky-men occasionally used to escape into a confusing kaleidoscopic beauty. She had only once ever tried the drug. The experience had made her inner eye sore for headachey days on end.

"The satin pads it. It's glued tight to the satin—"

"I just felt dizzy, Mr Pierre." Yes, dizzy for the damsels...for their cordial soft embraces, for their wild and tender kisses.

She had laid her *Book of the Land of Heroes* on the counter. The jeweller had chosen his five words, which now cavorted in her head, summoning other words together willy-nilly.

Eyeno spoke:

"Flash of emerald and sapphire,
"Eager fingers would acquire,
"Fingers black and bodies velvet,
"Pompous serpents send their pets."

"Do you mean," exclaimed the jeweller, "that Juttahats will want to buy gems for the Velvet Isi? That the snakes want sparklers?"

"I don't mean anything, Missieur Pierre. It's the verse itself that means something."

"Why, that's wonderful news...except that Juttahats can't come into town... There'd be riots. Surely they wouldn't attack us in force here in Threelakes just to rob my shop! Should I take my wares to them? All the way north of Saari?"

"I don't know, Mr Pierre."

"Trade with the Isi? What an idea. I might become rich!"

Eyeno left the jeweller to his excited new dream. She herself felt dizzy as she retraced her steps along the Street of Crafts, clutching her book box to her. Passers-by glanced at the sparkle in her eye.

“What happened to you?" gasped Juke.

She hadn't forewarned him.

Standing guard over several knapsacks packed with purchases in the panelled lobby of

the hostel, her brother seemed as hard and angular as the faces of the false gemstone at which he gawped, befuddled.

"I bought an eye from Missieur Pierre," she said lightly. "I paid a mark and a half, and a fortune. Do you like it?"

"That's...a gemstone? So big?"

"It's just an imitation one."

"I thought it was a growth from inside you! I thought your secret eye had forced its way out—cut its way out—and that's what your secret eye really looks like. A blue crystal...Oh Eyeno, have you been yearning for this for all these years?" His voice caught. "I'd have pulled out my own eye if it could have taken root in you."

She hurried to embrace him. She laughed, even as a sob shook her. How chivalrous he was.

"Then you would only have had one eye, dear Juke."

Her brother held her awkwardly. His fingers strayed towards her cheek, tracing a route towards her hard false peeper. His fingertips drew back.

"Touch it if you want to, Juke."

"No, I might put some dirt on it..."

His fingers were sweaty. He pulled away.

They had several knapsacks to shoulder.

One of the mocky-men with whom they rendezvoused in the forest was Pieman. Eyeno's dream had loaded the boughs of kasta trees with jewels instead of nuts. The crusty-skinned fellow stared askance at her new eye as the waiting trio heard how she had come by it.

"That's meant to be an aquamarine," declared Pieman. "I've been to Saari where fine ladies like their baubles. I know! Miners can dig up huge crystals just like it. They don't cost too much at all. So why imitate one in glass? I'm thinking that's a real one he's given you—"

"Unlikely!"

Juke glanced at his sister suspiciously, and she flushed. Surely he didn't imagine for a moment that she had pleased that scrawny jeweller in such a way that he would give her a genuine gem!

"You don't know what you're blethering about," Knotty told Pieman. Knotty's skin looked as though it was made out of brown rope and string in which a thousand tangles had been tied, and he wore a tunic of hessian to match.

"I do too! I've talked to miners."

"It's paste," insisted Eyeno. "It's just glass with metals added to colour it."

"Maybe it was a shot at making glass look like emerald. But the wrong metals got mixed in, or not enough of 'em. Emerald's a cousin of aquamarine. I'm thinking your jeweller's passed off a botch. Nobody would want a fake aquamarine."

Juke caught Pieman by the collar. "Don't say that! It's what my sister wanted."

"Easy, easy," intervened Lammas. He only wore shorts and sandals since his body was coated in tufty grey wool a finger's span thick. Wool sprouted from his scalp. "Aren't you the know-all, Pie-face? Let's not spoil the girl's pleasure."

Her dream diverged. In the dream she plucked out the glass aquamarine. Clutching the paste gem in her

hand, Eyeno sprinted back into town, arriving there almost immediately. But the Street of Crafts had changed. In place of Missieur Pierre's there stood a money shop – a shop where you could buy coins with coins, which in her dream seemed to be a perfectly just and equitable arrangement. A mark for a mark; a penny for a penny. Consequently coins circulated quickly and the town prospered. This money shop was crowded with richly dressed people all brandishing coins. She swiftly found herself in the forefront, clad in a gown which was dingy and raggy. She was facing a brawny apron-clad shopkeeper. Behind his counter buckets and buckets of coins overflowed on to the floor. The man's moon-shaped face was the bronze of a penny, on which his features were merely engraved. His was a crescent mouth. Coin-eyes were miniatures of his whole face. Within those eyes, a tinier crescent mouth and tinier eyes. Would those tinier eyes also contain his whole face in minuscule?

"Mr Penny!" the eager shoppers clamoured. "Mr Penny!"

Eyeno thrust her glass jewel at Mr Penny. She was consumed with a desire to wear a bronze penny in her eye. She wanted a metal monocle of visible value squeezed between her lids. The other customers burst out laughing. They guffawed, they brayed. Mr Penny's crescent mouth cracked open in a grin. He quaked with merriment.

"Gold for glass!" he hooted.

No, she didn't need a golden orb with Lucky's head on it. A bronze penny would be fine. An ordinary penny minted in Saari, stamped with an anchor on front for security and an eye on the rear for prudence. An eye, to fit in her eye, why of course!

She had thought of this before. When she was younger she had several times privately pushed a penny into her empty socket. But unless she kept her head tilted right back the flat coin would never stay there. It would quickly fall out. You couldn't walk round staring straight up at the top of the sky. In her dream she forgot all about such silly contretemps. She flourished her paste gem which had cost a mark and a half and a fortune.

"Please, Mr Penny!"

The keeper of the money shop chortled. "Bronze for a botch, bronze for a bungle!"

"I coin words too," she cried in appeal. "I'm a poetess." She realized that her feet were bare. She was a pauper, in rags, with a cheap chunk of cut glass in her hand.

The bronze-faced man leered at her. "Which word will you pay me," he asked slyly, "which you can never ever use again? Will you pay me I" – he struck his chest – "or eye" – "and he pointed to one of the coins in his face – "or love, or true, or twice?"

Horror invaded her heart. She couldn't possibly hand over to him any word that would be lost to her forever. Fighting her way through the crowd, who plucked at her rags and stamped on her toes, she fled.

In reality, the false aquamarine had begun to tarnish after only a few months. Its initial brilliance faded, so maybe Pieman had been right after all.

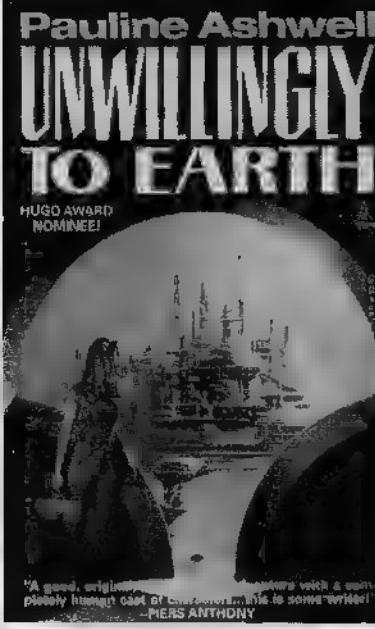
Eyeno remembered the fortune with which she had paid Missieur Pierre: Fingers black and bodies velvet, Pompous serpents... Next year when they drove goats

and took those gloves and cheeses as far as Saari, she would travel onward, east by north, into the territory of the Velvet Isi and their black Juttahats to ask the serpents for a false eye. She had tried to obtain one too easily, too frivolously. A daisy paperweight eye, an aquamarine eye... gewgaws! She would get herself an eye made by aliens. That would be a worthy one.

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Ian Watson has contributed at least eight previous stories to Interzone, ranging from "The People on the Precipice" (issue 13) to "Swimming with the Salmon" (issue 63). The above piece is a self-contained episode from his new novel *Lucky's Harvest* (Gollancz, September 1993). He lives in the village of Moreton Pinkney, Northamptonshire.

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Ansible Link

David Langford



Another month, another convention: this time it's Mexicon, the British celebration of "written sf," that has left me shattered. This was in Scarborough, Yorkshire, in a hotel other than the one that dropped off a cliff the week after. Guests included cyberdrunk Pat Cadigan (who, hot for publicity, kept demanding to be slandered in print and issuing great ululating cries of "YOU DOG, LANGFORD!" when your reporter failed to get her on an early page of *The Sun*) and Norman Spinrad (who communicated his Secret Red Hot Chilli recipe for 100-150 people; this was duly served, but Hotel Portion Control seemed to expect 600-1,200 eaters and ended up with an EC chilli-mountain of leftovers). Still on the theme of written sf, uncloseted thespian Ken Campbell gave a preview of his indescribable new one-man performance *Jamais Vu* — successor to *Furtive Nudist* and *Pigspurt* — hailed by Brian Stableford as "Excellent" and by his daughter Kate as "Rather rude." Paul Brazier's long-awaited third issue of *Nexus SF* was unveiled, to cries of amazement at its comprehensive, topical coverage of the 1991 Mexicon (available from PO Box 1123, Brighton, BN1 6JS). Iain Banks danced erotically with a giant inflatable Edvard Munch "Scream" doll; Robert Holdstock confessed, "The slap of a wet oak leaf is one of the things I love most"; Kim Newman was bemused to learn about the launch of a possibly satirical Kim Newman Appreciation Society. The theme of written sf was rounded off by a selection of videos all having titles like *Piranha Women in the Avocado Jungle of Death*. You probably had to be there.

The Empire Never Ended

Deborah Beale of Millennium SF broke an ancient taboo in her breathless little publicity vehicle *Antivitry: the Journal of Formication...* she actually plugged another publisher's book (*The Encyclopaedia of SF*). Could this herald an era of glasnost in which sf publishers admit their rivals exist and do not, for example, cross out everything in an author's lovingly prepared "Other Books By Me" list which happens to be published by unpersons?

Faith Brooker of Gollancz upbraided me loudly for having so much as mentioned that vile rumour that the VGSF graphic-novels line might have

folded. "We've now signed up Pratchett's Mort," she screamed in triumph as I cowered, "and something by Gaiman & McKean too, so there!"

John W.Campbell continues to publish from beyond the grave. Just out: *The John W.Campbell Letters vol II: Asimov and van Vogt*, from AC Projects, 5106 Old Harding Rd, Franklin, TN 37064, USA. (\$45 plus \$2 postage in the USA, God knows how much elsewhere.)

John Clute revealed to an awed BSFA meeting that the secret of getting *SF Encyclopaedias* into print was to con the publishers and never, never let them know how much over budget the thing will inevitably go. He cheerily hefted a wad of paper not as thick as the *Encyclopaedia* itself, being the initial batch of faxed corrections from America... An update leaflet is available — SAE to 221 Camden High St, NW1 7BU. But: "I have a lot of things to add to this," chorused co-editors and others seeing its mere 5 pages.

George Turner, whose stroke was reported last issue, is recovering slowly but (as I write) awaits surgery for the blood clot in his neck which caused the trouble.

Infinitely Improbable

Hodline or Header? Publishers Hodder & Stoughton have merged with Headline as Hodder Headline PLC. Was Hodder's NEL sf list the last of note to be owned by a small, independent British firm?

Tax Assessment. How come Jack Vance knows the terminology of UK freelance taxation? In his novel *Throy*, the official term for brutal and summary punishment without trial is... Schedule D.

Ameritemps? The Midnight Rose shared-world anthology collective is crossing its fingers madly over a rumour that the US division of Penguin/Roc (having noted with surprise that the UK Temps, Weerde and Villicins anthologies actually sold a few copies) might yet stagger America with a *Best of All the Above Collections* anthology.

HarperCollins Science Fiction and Fantasy is now (as of August) the new, easily pronounced replacement for this publisher's verbose and tongue-twisting "Grafton" and "Fontana" imprints.

Isaac Asimov Award... it had to come. This offers a \$500 annual prize for the best unpublished sf/fantasy short by a full-time undergraduate (robots ineligible). Guidelines and submissions: Asimov Award, USF 3177, 4204 E.Fowler, Tampa, FL 33620-3177, USA. Deadline 15th November 1993.

British SF Association awards this year went to Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (novel), Ian McDonald's "The Innocents" (short) and Jim Burns's cover for *Hearts, Hands and Voices* (artwork). The Dramatic Presentation category, already dropped from this ballot owing to voters' supreme apathy, was officially abolished at the Association's AGM — which according to Charles Stross featured "wholly democratic unanimous votes and equally democratic one-candidate elections" throughout.

The Onlie Begetter. The Dreamberry Wine mail-order sf catalogue alerts me to a new view of history, expounded in W.H. Smith Bookcase #43. "Back in 1977 a debut novel called *Sword of Shannara* appeared and immediately invented the Epic Fantasy scene. Moving light-years away from the traditional theme of flawed futures, it instead depicted a fantastic other world of our mythological past. [The *Shannara* series] made Terry Brooks into one of the most powerful names in fantasy fiction as well as one of the most widely imitated." Imitated, presumably, by those feisty young plagiarists William Morris, E.R. Eddison and J.R.R. Tolkien among others...

Fiction Supplement. Mexicon also saw a competition for sf novels in precisely eight words, an idea pinched from Nick Lowe. This was won by Andy Lane's *The 90s SF Novel Revisited*: "Elvis calling Mars. Kennedy dead. I'm coming home." Best retelling: Brian Stableford's *The Time Machine* by A. Morlock: "Stuff good public relations, there's Eloi for tea!" Others preferred the same author's *The Island of Dr Moreau* by A. Beast: "Hand over your women! Are we not men?" An unauthorized condensation of Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* was disqualified... "Forever, televised live, she sucked his nitty-gritty." There you are, four bonus stories for this issue. (Our Editor: And who's going to pay the reprint fees for that lot?" Myself: "Well, at your standard rates it's only — Editor: "Ssshhhhh!"

Mutant Popcorn

Nick Lowe

By now it's apparent to everyone that the machines are evolving our children into a new form of intelligence, and that for the time being there's not a lot we can do about it beyond moodily speculating as to the awesome powers for good or evil the new race will possess when its first generation reaches maturity. According to the standard model, the future belongs to a world of postliterate flow junkies and postsocial virtual-experience addicts whose cybernautic skills and intuitive grasp of the structure of formal systems may not wholly compensate for their psychotic hoodlum urges to stomp heads, hurtle down pipes, and vault over badly-animated subhumans. So far, the principal signs that a wholly non-human subspecies is emerging have been (i) the miraculous ability to exist without proper pop and (ii) the power to sit through the CD-ROM trailer for Spaceship Warlock without breaking up in gales of derisive mirth.

But you can see where the race is heading — particularly from the movies, which for reasons not yet fully understood they still watch, and which their inexorable mass consuming power is slowly reshaping to their own as yet incomprehensible desires. It's already apparent in this summer's big ones: we can see that they hunger for interactivity between user and screen (the fantasy made real in *Last Action Hero*), and that they are driven by a mystic sense of evolutionary denial that has led to 1993 being twinned with the upper Cretaceous (in *Jurassic Park* and uncountable televisual mutations). What it all bodes, what these portents mean, lies beyond the limited dimensionality of our old ways of thinking. All we can see is that we are being superseded, and that merely getting them all hooked on Gerry Anderson at exactly the same age as their parents has at best delayed the evolutionary momentum by a couple of years.

It's in this light that we must try to understand *Super Mario Bros.*, a last despairing attempt by the old mind at building a communicative bridge with the new. For here is a film that has given hard thought to translating the appeal of the Mario worlds into

a medium of conventional story and characters, where creatures of flesh, not pixels, communicate by speech rather than head-bouncing, and where the skeletal narrative system of relentless forward motion, points and levels is masked, however superficially, beneath the outward skin of a standard Hollywood plot. Thus a rationale of sorts is constructed for the bonkers Nintendese universe of plumbbers and princesses, Mushroom Kingdoms and monster goons with resonantly naff and nonwestern names; the film's action does its ingenious best to mimic, in three dimensions and with full traditional special effects, the run-hop-jump quality of the game screens with their interminable pipes and elevators; and even the storyline exploits homologies between arcade action and film plotting in its merry scatter of collectable narrative utensils laid in the heroes' path by the ubiquitous hand of an unseen fungal intelligence.

But I wonder if they haven't tried too hard. To an adult viewer, *Super Mario Bros.* looks like an amusing, accessible, effective if conventional fantasy action-adventure that has spent a lot of effort — much of it successful — on creating personalities for a pair of cartoon figures whose sole distinction on gamescreen was the different heights they could jump to. Though the plotting is lazy and the motivation often insultingly stupid, the dialogue (re-written by Bill & Ted's Ed Solomon) is generally quite snappy, and nobody really disgraces themselves — not even Fiona Shaw, whose presence in all this is a little like Juliet Stevenson doing *Maniac Cop IV*, and whose character is so ineptly scripted it looks like an elaborate professional in-joke ("Lena, why are you doing this?" "Because I've earned this, and everyone deserves what they've earned!"). Nor have the needs of the target audience been neglected in the search for ideas: bonus lives for managing to get in both gratuitous dinosaurs and environmental conscience by reinventing the Marioverse as a parallel Earth into which the reptiles got catapulted by asteroid impact and evolved into a non-mammalian dominant species that has eaten up all of what are hand-wavingly dubbed "the resources"

(glimpse of desolate globe with nothing but Manhattan left on it), besides developing human-rights abuse to a fine art. This daft rigmarole (conclusively verified by a leading Earth-One archaeologist: "he moved the bones and found some iridium!") has so captivated its makers that they feel the need to upfront it with a pre-title "what-if" voiceover. But it's nothing to do with anything in the games; and you might forgive an eleven-year-old for feeling a little shortchanged.

For both the Mario mythology and the Nintendo feel have been fairly brutally treated. Despite the title, in the film the Marios are not even real brothers (it's just one of many loose ends that we never in fact unravel the mystery of Luigi's parentage), and more surprisingly still the Super Mario Bros. never actually appear at all, except as a feeble metaphor at the end. (Tiresome explanation for over-twelves: in the games, Mario has to be transformed by dosing up on special mushrooms into Super Mario, the one with the various enhanced powers who appears with a cape on the boxes.) And this has quite serious implications for the general momentum. The moment we learn of the evolution ray that can morph characters into their higher forms, it seems inevitable that the stops-out finale will involve the ray's mutating the Bros. into their Super versions, whereupon all the kids will yell and throw their popcorn in the air and even accompanying adults will sense a hint of that unforgettable uplift as when Sigourney gets into the exoskeleton. But no. The regular Marios slime the evil Koopa (in the games a generic category of goon — apparently they balked at retaining "Bowser" for the villain), go home to Brooklyn, movie ends. And other essentials of the mythos go the same way. The surreal but utterly stupid Mushroom Kingdom here mutates into the much more engaging fancy of a "de-evolved" king reinvading his realm as semi-intelligent fungus; Princess Daisy (*sic*) becomes a postgrad palaeontologist who doesn't even realize she's the rightful heir to a parallel universe; and while the designs and character names do allude quite extensively to elements from the



games, this is essentially an all-new replacement scenario with a new cast and a lot of quite inventive filler ideas.

To us primitives, this is all unexpectedly reassuring and welcome; but I've a feeling the kids may rebel, because in the end *Super Mario Bros.* is simply a far too conventional film to satisfy the enlarged and alien appetites of the Nintendoid brain. It makes too much sense, has too much content, and comes nowhere close to reproducing the energy of pure form, transcending anything as crude and embodied as storytelling, that immersion in video-play delivers. Instead, it's a film by adults, built from an unevolvedly adult conceptual toolkit, that tries to understand the world of Mario as a multidimensional world of people and things, words and ideas. As such, it largely succeeds. But that world, our world, is already obsolete; and we, its prisoners, are left helpless and uncomprehending behind as our children's consciousness merges with that of the machines and ascends into an alien dimension of mind where we are powerless to follow. Unless, that is, we score enough of the right sort of mushroom.

Meanwhile, for the evolutionarily stranded over-twenties who can't dance to this stuff, this month's digital reissue with bonus cuts is *The Abyss* in what is coded the "Special

Edition" (ie it's inordinately long, the director has already carried the can for the original cut, and it's only a restricted promo release for the video reissue anyway). And indeed it's remarkable how, just four years on, this movie seems a relic of a vanished world. One can hardly blame Jim Cameron for the datestamps of politics, technology, and genre: the brink-of-WWIII subplot restored to the narrative just when it's become permanently obsolete, the childlike delight with which the cast greet the sight of their first morph (poor fools, if they only knew), and our nostalgic recognition now of that brief and baffling deepsea subgenre as a final death spasm of the great space movie of the 80s. Even at time of making, the script had been knocking around a decade (reflected in the troublesome extended borrowings from *2001* and *Close Encounters*), and no amount of virtuosic craftsmanship could cover up the fundamental immaturity of the climactic idea.

Nor, indeed, does the recut, which restores all kinds of embarrassing stuff that was wisely excised from the original, and exposes with dismaying frankness the limitations of Cameron's imagination and writing. Back as the aliens' homily on human nature ("it bothers them to see us hurting each other") and their Watchmen-cloned ex machina solution to the international

crisis, complete with dodgy 2nd-unit footage of mass panic and mile-high tsunamis. Back, too, is a lot of grimy banter in the vastly overextended early section to establish the blue-collar tuffness of the ensemble ("Hit me with that 9/16ths," &c.), slowing the pace and further protracting the utter confusingness of the whole expository phase; and back is an absolutely terrible monologue about candles Mastrantonio drivels out during Harris's final descent into the Nietzschean depths, which it would be reassuring to be able to believe was merely improvised. None of this nonsense does the film any good at all, while the Linda Ronstadt sequence is an alarming glimpse of a great film sense tumbled completely over the edge. A three-hour restored cut of *Dune* or *The Draughtsman's Contract* might actually make something new; this doesn't, and dilutes much of what was best about the old.

Yet at least three-quarters of this movie are still some of the most magnificent cinema of Cameron's whole career, and a re-view in 70mm and Dolby is easily worth the half-hour's additional tiresomeness. The great set pieces are still great (though I'm sorry we've actually lost the rat in the fluorocarbon, a curious sop to cruelty-free sensibilities); the strong, funny character supports all deserve to have been in things since; and there's space to appreciate the sheer technical brilliance of things like design, sound, and especially editing that get lost in the spell of a first encounter, and wither on the small screen anyway. It's painfully, gloriously old-fashioned filmmaking, the kind of huge noble dinosaur of a movie they already don't really make any more; for as Harris warns us in the restored final moral, "THEY want us to grow up a bit and put away childish things." And for us, whether he knows it or not, that means no more iridescent motherships and angelic aliens, no more coded religious narratives and gazing into the abyss. It may have served us, but our scampering evolutionary successors need to raise their blood heat higher than we can manage on our lifestyle of basking and forage. Just hope they settle us in a nice retirement park.

(Nick Lowe)

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Downstream

Stephen Baxter

“**S**tone! Stone...”

Even as she called to him the voice of his mother was failing, attenuating into the silence of Downstream.

Keeping his fingers and toes jammed into the rock of the Floor, Stone lifted his head and looked Downstream. The current battered the back of his skull.

His mother held up her arms to him, the fingers which had failed her outstretched. Her face, with its halo of greying hair, sank like a dream into the unattainable Downstream.

Already, in mere heartbeats, she was lost, much too far Downstream for anyone to climb down to her and return.

“I'll always love you!” he cried.

When his mother fell Stones-of-Ice had been feeding on a fat tube-spider's egg. He'd spotted the Larva trapping the egg moments earlier.

The Larva was a cylinder of translucent flesh, fixed to the Floor with a circlet of fine hooks. Its body was much taller than a man's, and it reached far into Midstream, away from the Floor; pale, feathery fans, fluttering in the Stream, grabbed at the fine morsels of food that tumbled down from the unknowable Upstream.

The Larva supported the little linear colony of fifty adults and children. The Larva's pickings from Midstream were much more nutritious than the fragments which bowled along in the stale currents close to the Floor.

One day the Larva would unpin its hook-roots and swim off Downstream, on its way to its next, unknowable, stage of life. The people would have to follow it – gingerly clambering Downstream – or die.

Stones-of-Ice had climbed cautiously along the body of the patient, insensate Larva, reaching for the fans. He'd avoided the Larva's flickering tongue as it patiently coated the fans with sticky mucus. He took the egg from the outstretched fans and edged away from the Larva, clambering over the backs of the people. They clung to their tenuous holds, fingers and toes anchored deep in the rock, heads bent against the current. Infants squirmed, tucked securely between bodies and rock Floor; they lapped at the tiny pool-drops of water which clung to the rock face.

Stone had passed Flower-of-Bones, his kid sister, and broke off a piece of the egg for her. Flower was so named after a particularly spectacular configuration of bones, not even remotely human, which had come

drifting down from Upstream on the day she was born. He had given her the egg, and Flower had grinned at him around a sticky mouthful. As she ate she pressed the palm of her hand against her mouth, so that her long fingers reached up and over her scalp, like a mask of pink flesh.

...And then his mother had fallen.

“Stone...”

Receding rapidly she was still calling to him, still pointing. He saw the dull sparkle of her necklace as a point of light in the Downstream darkness. The necklace was a thing of chitin bits threaded on a rope – crude and precious. He remembered how she'd taken him to the Larva as an infant, helped him reach up for his first succulent morsels.

He would never see her again.

He probed at his feelings. He was wistful, he supposed, but not sad; old age – losing hold – came to them all, in the end.

But she seemed, even now, to be pointing. And not at him. Past him.

He raised his face into the oncoming Stream. The invisible substance battered his cheeks, but he breathed easily; the air which sustained him was a still, superfluid component of this swirling, endless flow. He peered Upstream. A storm cloud could be deadly – fat with raindrops and laden with electricity – and they would have to shelter. But, ultimately, a cloud would be a thing to be welcomed: the rain replenished the life-giving sheen of water droplets, clinging to the Floor by surface tension, which kept them all alive...

Then he saw it. Not a cloud, not even a hailstorm of the type which had given him his name. Something far stranger came tumbling along the Floor: an ungainly corpse from some community far Upstream, impossibly long limbs flailing. And it came straight at Flower-of-Bones.

Flower – and their father – hadn't noticed the incoming danger. But even as she fell his mother had tried to warn him.

“No!”

He lifted himself away from the Floor. The Stream battered at his chest. He scabbled sideways across the Floor, jabbing his fingers and toes carelessly into gaps in the crumbling rock.

Once he lost his footing; for an instant he clung by one hand to the rock, his legs dangling, his body flapping against the surface. But he hauled himself back to the Floor and scrambled on, careless of the danger. He had to reach Flower before that tumbling corpse.

"Flower! Flower!"

He clambered over the patient line of people, past his father, grabbing for holds at shoulders and hair. Flower was just beyond his reach, now. She'd seen the corpse and she screamed, bits of egg still clinging to her chin and mouth.

He risked a single glance Upstream. The corpse, angular, suited in a carapace of armour, was close enough for him to see into its staring, eyeless skull-sockets.

He grabbed Flower. He wrenched her away from the Floor and lifted her high into the Stream. She wriggled, limbs fluttering in the current. Stone arced her, one-armed, back over his body and brought her down into the arms of his father.

His father wrapped his arms around Flower, pinning her tight.

Stone looked up.

The skull-face of the Upstream corpse, peering from an outlandish helmet, plunged straight at him.

The body engulfed him, a spider of bones and chitin armour. Long, multi-jointed limbs wrapped themselves around him. He felt angular elbows, lumps of decayed, feathery flesh, dig into his back.

The skull was long and distorted; the remains of vast lips flapped before his face. He screamed, squirming, trying to push the thing off him.

He lost his grip.

He fell upwards, away from the Floor. The Stream snatched at him, harder than he had imagined; it seemed to wrap a fist of pressure around his chest. The bony, distorted corpse fell away from him, folding over itself.

He reached below him, trying to turn –

But the Floor was out of reach.

He swivelled, turning his face Upstream. Already his people were falling away from him, a row of skinny bodies clinging to the Floor around the waving tube of the Larva. He saw – or imagined he saw – the faces of his father, of Flower, turned down to him in shock.

He heard the voice of his father, drifting Downstream to him. "We'll always love you..."

That was all. Soon the murk of distance enclosed even the Larva's tubular form.

Midstream was cold, silent, empty save for food-fragments which drifted around him; the lichen-glow of the Floor picked out only the corpse from far Upstream, his sole, grinning companion.

No one could travel Upstream. He would never see his people again. He stared into the unending darkness of Downstream.

So, in heartbeats, his life had ended.

The Upstream corpse tumbled as it fell alongside him. It was almost graceful in its slow, languid movements – but it was impossibly alien: its arms and legs were twice the length of Stone's, and its fingers – reduced to chains of bones – were thin and multi-jointed.

The face, with its immense, rotting lips, looked as if it was designed to clamp onto the Floor surface. Stone imagined a long tongue, prehensile itself, flicking out of that ugly mouth and delving for food deep into fine cracks in the Floor; perhaps the mouth would be

strong enough to hold the body against the flow of the current alone. The head, torso and legs were encased in sheets and tubes of armour – chitin from some animal, softly luminescent, stitched together.

Someone had killed this strange warrior and sent it tumbling Downstream.

Warrior? It was more like a spider, Stone thought with disgust. Stone's people were real humans – the original form which had emerged from the Crash, spilling into the Stream so long ago. This spider-warrior – and its stranger cousins from even further Upstream – were aberrations. Mutants.

He lifted his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms around his legs, letting the Stream buffet him, apathetic.

Far Upstream, there were huge, strange communities. Vast wars were fought. Sometimes bodies rained down from Upstream, thicker than food fragments.

How the spider-folk lived – and what their battles were about – no one could know, of course. It was impossible to climb Upstream to find out. And only once in Stone's memory had a living human ever travelled down the Stream to Stone's people – another wounded soldier, one arm severed, eyes bloodied and staring. It had sailed over Stone, screaming insane curses; Stone had cowered against the Floor, in the shelter of his father's arms...

A touch at his back.

At first it was feather-light, almost ticklish. Then, in an instant, it became firm, enclosing, grasping; it felt as if he had been wrapped in a hundred thin, sticky ropes.

He struggled, opening out his limbs. Clinging threads stretched between his legs and pinned his arms to his body.

Spider-web.

The web was a broad cylinder, anchored to the Floor. Its mouth was wide but the web funnelled rapidly into a narrow neck. The webbing stretched, elastic, hauling him down from the Stream. He fell into the neck; the walls of the web-tube were soft, warm, yielding. Floor-lichen light filled the web, making it a corridor of spectral beauty.

Damn. Was it over so quickly? How could he have been so stupid? A spider-web was visible enough; if he'd been watching, he'd have had plenty of time to swim up and out of the way.

The gauzy webbing seemed only to tighten as he struggled.

After a few heartbeats he gave up; he relaxed in the enfolding grip of the web, letting its sticky, half-alive substance wrap tighter around his legs.

His breath slowed. Gradually, his mood softened; soon he felt strangely at peace. Since losing his grip on the Floor he'd been doomed anyway. It was comfortable here, in a way even secure. The web was soft, mistily pretty...

At least it was done. His endless, purposeless fall through the Stream was finished. No more questions; no more hope; no more events. He closed his eyes. Perhaps he'd be able to slide quietly into insensibility as the lack of food overcame him...

The web shuddered.

...And again, rattling him in his cage of sticky web-stuff. His muscles clenched. His eyes snapped open.

The spider. It was coming at him, spiralling out from the throat of the web, clambering around the widening walls. Its legs flickered, long, feathery, and that mouth – with mandibles endlessly scissoring – would slip easily around Stone's head.

His elegiac mood of acceptance vanished, washed away into the Downstream of his awareness. Suddenly, vividly, he did not want to die. He lunged against the web bonds, screaming, causing the web itself to ripple. But his struggles seemed only to add strength to the webbing around him.

The spider's body was coated in fine, white hairs; a ghastly moustache of fur lined its mouth, meat particles clinging...

"Stone. Stone!"

Flower's voice? He was dreaming, of course; fantasizing – and now the spider was close, close –

He stared into that mouth, he fear fading into fascination. He wondered how long a snipped-off head would remain aware, as it tumbled into the pit of digestive juices inside the spider.

A ripping sound, behind him; a small, warm hand scrabbling over his back. "Stone! You've got to get out of there!"

He twisted his head, straining his trapped neck. "Flower-of-Bones?"

His sister was clinging to the outside of the web, strands of the stuff trailing from her lithe limbs. She was hacking at the web with a chip of smashed-off Floor. She looked into his eyes, her sweet, familiar face creased with anxiety.

Energy, urgency flooded him. He got a leg free. He kicked at the webbing, scraping the stuff away from his other leg. Flower cut through the web around one arm; he took her scraper and dragged the crude edge through the webbing around his other arm, careless of gouges in his flesh.

He pushed his way backwards – at last – out of the web. Strands clung to his flesh, stretching, as if nostalgic for his presence.

The jaws of the spider loomed over the hole in the web. Mandibles protruded from that sightless sketch of a face, seeking the spider's lost meal; then a long, black tongue began to lick at the webbing, extruding new strands to plate over the gap the humans had wrought.

Stone clutched Flower to him, relishing her warm, familiar scent.

Then, hand in hand, they let themselves fall away from the web and tumble Downstream.

Above and around them there was only the darkness of the endless, infinite, unknowable Midstream. Below them was the Floor, its coat of lichen softly glowing, its rocky surface worn smooth by the current.

Flower was staring down moodily. "I wonder where it comes from."

"What?"

"The Stream." Her face was round, child-like – well, she was still a child – but there was a calm depth, an intelligence there.

He smiled at her, in the manner of an adult. "The Stream is a mixture of two fluids," he told her. "The bulk of it is a superfluid – stationary, light and frictionless – and that's the part that contains the air we

breathe. The rest of the Stream is a viscous mass, flowing at high speed, and that's what we feel as the Stream – that's what is sweeping us along like this. The two components flow through each other; it's as if they were two separate Streams in the same space, in fact. And it's just as well for us that they are separate, for we couldn't draw breath if we had to take our air from the viscous part of the Stream, and –"

"That's not what I asked," she said, sounding irritated.

He was disconcerted. "What?"

"Oh, come on, Stones-of-Ice. All you're doing is parroting what father used to tell us –"

"Parroting?" He was appalled at her disrespect. "But this is learning which has survived since the Crash itself."

"Yes," she said with strained patience, "but it's not telling me anything I want to know." She stared into the huge, empty volumes around them. "I want to know where the Stream comes from – where it's going to. Where would we end up, if we never went down to the Floor again?"

"We'd end up dead," he said practically. "Starved."

"Where did people come from? How did they get here? Are there people all the way Downstream, forever and ever? And all the way Upstream as well?"

"We'll never know." Questions like these occasionally occurred to Stone, but they never troubled him. The Stream was just there, all around him. It gave his world its framework: Downstream was forever separated from here, which was forever separated from Upstream – as surely as his own childhood was separated from him forever by the flow of time.

"But why can't we know?"

She looked at him, and suddenly he felt embarrassed that he could not give her an answer.

He felt resentful. He owed his life to his sister, but – he realized slowly – she might actually be smarter than he was. It wasn't a comfortable thought –

Flower-of-Bones gasped. She pointed, pulling Stone closer to her.

Suddenly, the Floor wasn't featureless... There were people here, unimaginably far Downstream as they were, great sheets of them clinging to the rock like human lichen.

In wordless panic brother and sister clawed at the thin, powerful Stream, trying to swim up and away from the Floor and deeper into Midstream.

They were suspended over a city of squat chitin buildings, of structures of rope and web, bright lichen-pits hacked into the Floor... and dozens, hundreds of people. It was a community unimaginably larger than the simple huddle of folk they'd left Upstream.

Flower whispered, "do you think they can see us?"

"No. I don't think so. Even if they could, they can't reach us." He thought it over. "Although it might be better if they could."

She looked at him, her face round and troubled. "What do you mean?"

Gently, he said, "sooner or later we're going to have to go down again, to the Floor. We'll starve up here. And it might be better to land where there are already people. They might take us in. Help us. We can't survive alone, Flower."

Flower grimaced, pulling a comical face at Stone.

"But not here. Not with them. They're so ugly."

From up here the Floor-city people looked like squat animals, burrowing into the rock. Flower held up her own free hand, stretching her long fingers; she curled the fingers back over themselves, letting the tips touch the back of her hands. "Look at those people. Stubby fingers and toes, round little heads, tubes for bellies. It's amazing they can get a grip of the Floor at all."

He patted her arm affectionately. "If you think like that you shouldn't have come after me."

"It's just as well I did, spider-morsel. You wouldn't have lasted five heartbeats without me."

"I know that." He meant it; he wished he had some way of expressing it better. His sister had sacrificed everything – her parents, her people, her life itself – to fall Downstream, irrevocably, after her brother.

He searched his heart, hoping that if their positions had been reversed he would have found the courage to do the same thing.

She pointed. "Look down there. See, those tube-shapes moving along the ropes?"

Stone squinted. The translucent tubes, twice as tall as he was, edged their way through the webbing of ropes. He thought he could see people, curled up inside the moving tubes; but that was impossible, of course, for the tubes looked like –

Like larvae. Unfamiliar forms – perhaps different species from those he was used to – but, yes, they were larvae! And people were riding inside them, in what looked like perfect comfort! Why, with such a steed it might even be possible to move Upstream – a little way anyway. And –

And, he wondered wistfully, how would it be to shelter one's head, one's aching lungs – if only for a short while – from the endless buffeting pressure of the Stream?

The city grew sparser, with wide patches of dull Floor between the scattered settlements. At last they were sailing over bare rock once more, and the lights of the city flattened into the distance.

Flower pointed at the Floor Downstream. "Look. I think it's a net farm."

Stone – still dreaming of larva-riding – twisted and looked down.

The nets lined the Floor, a family of them in a neat array, with their faces turned patiently Upstream. The nearest net was a translucent disc, barely visible in the lichen-light; it quivered as bits of current-borne waste pounded into its fine structure.

"You're right," he said. "Come on; let's go down."

They struggled through the Stream, clawing at its thin, powerful substance with their hands.

Stone dropped against the Floor, a little way Upstream from the largest net. He let his fingers and long toes pry deep into the rock face, grasping at fine crevices; the Floor was hard, warm, familiar against his chest, and he felt secure for the first time since he'd lost his grip.

Flower-of-Bones landed beside him. He patted her hand. "Let's see what we can get to eat."

Fingers and toes working, they swarmed along the Floor, Downstream towards the farm.

Flower pointed, silently, past the first net. Beyond,

the solitary farmer-beetle was labouring at its crop. The beetle's squat body was pressed flat against the Floor, smooth and streamlined; its blind head, raised into the flow, moved in steady figures-of-eight as it wove its nets.

Stone and Flower crept towards a net far from the beetle.

The net bulged in the Stream, laden with scraps. Stone wrapped the sticky threads around his hands and pulled himself to his knees, letting the flow of the Stream press him securely against the net. He found meat, bits of larvae, eggs. Much of it was decayed, of course, and some – from far Upstream – was too unfamiliar even to be safe to try. But he found some reasonably fresh fragments. He pulled a piece of spider-limb from the net – it came away with a soft plop – and passed it to Flower. He crammed a second piece into his mouth. Juices slipped down his chin as he chewed, pulling more food from the net...

Flower screamed.

He whirled. He dropped his bits of food – they went sailing over the net rim and Downstream – and he fell backwards against the net.

Two people had come upon them – two adults, a woman and a man. The woman was already lying over Flower, pinning her face-down against the Floor, easily suppressing his sister's struggles. The woman grinned, her skull round and feral. The man crawled along the Floor towards Stone. He was grim-faced, his head shaven crudely; he carried a knife of Floor-rock in his teeth, and his eyes were fixed on Stone.

He was only heartbeats away.

Stone turned, transfixed. The hunter's fingers were short, flat-tipped, and his toes mere stubs; his chest was round, scraping awkwardly against the Floor. But he moved powerfully; Stone would never be able to match such strength. And he wore a necklet – a crude thing, of chitin threaded on rope.

His mother's.

Was it possible? Had his mother – old, too feeble to grip – fallen among these people?

And – he found himself wondering with horror – had she been already dead when she arrived here?

The knife, underlit by the Floor's lichen, cast a deep shadow upwards over the hunter's flat nose. There was no anger in that face, Stone realized, just – anticipation. Suddenly Stone saw himself through the man's pale eyes – as something weak, barely human, from the far Upstream – as meat.

The man pressed his legs flat against the Floor and raised his upper body. He lifted the knife high over Stone's face. Stone stared at the knife, saw each detail of its chipped, crudely sharpened edge.

Flower, somewhere, was screaming –

No. It wasn't Flower.

The man flattened himself against the Floor, shoving his knife between his teeth. He twisted trying to see what was going on.

The woman still lay atop Flower. But she was scrabbling at her neck, sharp teeth glinting in lichen-light.

A pole of wood, a spear, protruded from her back.

Flower lurched to her knees. The woman was thrown off, rolling sideways. The spear shaft scraped against the Floor. As the woman fell on the shaft there was a soft, obscene sound of tearing – the woman's

eyes opened wide, seeing nothing, and her mouth stretched silently – and then the shaft broke with a sharp snap.

Head lolling, the woman fell upwards, away from the Floor. The spear shaft tumbled after her, lost in a moment.

Stone turned back to the man, raising his arms – but the hunter had already gone, scrambling sideways over the surface.

Stone lay flat against the Floor and wormed his way to his sister. Her toes and fingers dug deep in the rock, she was crying and shuddering. Stone was aware of the tightness of his own throat, the trembling of his taut muscles. He wrapped an arm over her thin back, pressing Flower securely against the Floor. "It's all right," he whispered. "They're gone."

There was a hand on his shoulder. "Yes, but there must be more of them. And they'll be back –"

Stone twisted his neck, scraping his cheek on the Floor.

A woman – squat, with spadelike fingers – lay against the Floor beside him. She was smiling at him. She lifted her arm from his shoulder, showing him her empty arms. She spoke to them, but Stone couldn't understand. She kept smiling and tried again, and this time her speech was a clatter of clicks and glottal stops; still the words were unrecognizable. The woman tried a third time, and now, suddenly, her words were clear. "It's all right," she said. "I won't hurt you. It's all right. All right. I – Do you understand me?" She grinned at their nods. "Good. At last." Her accent was strange, Stone thought, but her words were easily comprehensible. "My. You've fallen a long way, haven't you? Come into the larva. You'll feel better..."

"Into the what?"

She glanced over her shoulder.

Clinging to the Floor, just a short crawl away, was a larva – broad, magnificent, twice the size of the Larva which had sustained his family. Its fans, glistening with mucus, faced the Stream defiantly.

And beyond its translucent walls, within the body of the larva itself, Stone saw a human.

Stone pressed his fingers into the flesh of the larva, wondering. He was inside the larva. The flesh-hull around him yielded, soft, moist, warm. Far above his head the larva's pads waved, and beyond the walls the Stream rushed.

The four of them – Flower, Stone and the two city-women – huddled, their legs pressed together. In the confined space Stone was aware of the scent of humans: a musty warmth he remembered from a childhood spent scurrying across the Floor beneath the safe bellies of his parents.

For the first time in his life he was out of the Stream. His head felt clear, easy, his breathing easy. It was wonderful.

Flower-of-Bones said, "doesn't it hurt the larva, to have us sit inside him like this?"

"No." It was the one called Speaker-to-Upstream – the one who had come out to save them from the hunters, the one who had thrown the spear. She was squat, like her companion, but not without grace; she wore a suit of woven net-fabric, soft and comfortable-looking, with tools tucked into a belt. "No, we won't hurt him." She reached out behind herself and stroked

the larva's inner wall with a robust affection. "This is the larva's stomach lining... But it's designed to be open to the Stream, like this. Every stomach needs a lot of surface area, because food is digested through the surface." She poked gently at Flower's belly. "Your stomach is coiled up inside you – you carry around all that area, stored neatly away. The larva's stomach is opened out – the creature is all stomach, really. And its body traps a pocket of the Stream, sheltering it from the current, and filters food particles from it."

Flower looked uneasy; she squirmed away from where she was sitting.

Speaker-to-Upstream laughed. "Don't worry; you're much too big to digest. The larva is interested in microscopic fragments – tiny pieces – that's all. But you asked a good question."

She smiled at Flower. "You must have asked yourself other questions. Haven't you ever wondered what the Stream is for?"

"Yes," Flower said. "I have."

The second woman – Rider-of-Larvae, Stone remembered – grinned and ruffled Flower's hair. Flower-of-Bones glared at her until she stopped.

"Good for you. But do you have any answers?" Rider asked.

"I've a question. Why did you save us?" Stone demanded.

Speaker smiled. "Because you were too interesting to let those barbarians eat you up. Look." Gently she lifted Stone's hand, uncurled his long fingers, and pressed her own hand against his. Her palm was dry, somehow confident. But her fingers had only three joints above the knuckle, while Stone's had six.

He let his fingers fold down over hers.

Speaker said, "you've come from a long way Upstream, haven't you?"

Rider leaned towards Stone. "We can tell. And not just because you look different. Even your language has drifted away from ours, significantly. It's really quite precise; we've even put together a map of the Upstream – schematically, anyway – based on language drift... You've diverged a long way from us, you see. Since The Crash. The further Upstream the more isolated the communities are, and the more diverse the adaptation. Nothing can pass Upstream – not even information – so adaptations, language distortions, genetic changes, can only propagate Downstream. We're closer to the original form than you are – more of a mix, you see –"

Stone scowled. "Original form?" He, and Flower-of-Bones, were the original form. Of course they were; everyone at home had known that. "What are you talking about?"

Speaker sighed. "We don't know much about our origins. We know there was a Crash – a ship came here, from somewhere else, and fell into this Stream-world... Humans were scattered all along the Floor, and left to cling to the rock for their lives. But that's the sum of our knowledge. All we really know is that humans don't belong here. That's why we're going Downstream."

Flower was wide-eyed. "Downstream? In this larva? How far?"

Speaker touched her cheek. "As far as it takes. Forever, perhaps."

Rider said, "maybe the Stream doesn't go on forever. How could it be infinite, after all? Perhaps it circles back on itself, like a huge wheel, so that Downstream at last becomes Upstream... Think of that."

"Or," Speaker said, "there may be twin singularities – a black hole at the far Downstream, feeding a wormhole which –"

"I don't know what those words mean," Stone said, embarrassed. He pressed his hands flat against the larva's flesh. To have tamed a larva... "Speaker," he said slowly. "Can this larva take us Upstream?"

She studied him, the age lines around her eyes softened by the diffuse lichen-light; she wore her hair tied back behind her neck. "We can't take you home. I'm sorry."

Flower wriggled past the women and grabbed Stone's hand. Her face was shining. "Stone, let's stay with them."

Rider touched their shoulders, embracing them both. "Come with us; let's fly with this larva into the Downstream. The Upstream's gone... but at least we can find out what's at the end of it all."

"Can we, Stone? Oh, can we?"

Stone stared beyond the larva's thin flesh – beyond the net farm, and into the lost infinity of Upstream.

"I'll always love you," he whispered.

Then he turned Downstream. And smiled.

Stephen Baxter has written over a dozen stories for Interzone, beginning with "The Xeelee Flower" (issue 19). His most recent novel is the "Victorian" sf extravaganza *Anti-Ice* (HarperCollins) – not to be confused with Colin Greenland's Victorian space opera *Harm's Way*, from the same publisher.

Back Issues

Stocks of Interzone issues 20 and 21 have now run out, so we have to add them to the growing list of out-of-print Interzones.

All other back issues (i.e. apart from numbers 1, 5, 6, 7, 17, 20, 21, 22 and 23) are still available at £2.50 each (£2.80 or \$5 overseas) from the address on page 3 – as are the 14 back issues of MILLION: The Magazine about Popular Fiction.

Interaction

Continued from page 5

Shirley Jackson and Ramsey Campbell. I'd like to add, though, that S.T. Joshi's piece on King is by no means typical of the sort of critical article we published in MILLION. In general, I tried to encourage contributors not to take "condemnatory" stances, but to approach their subjects in the spirit of "what makes this writer so popular with so many, and why have I too enjoyed his/her work?" However, one drawback of this attempt at a generous approach was that it brought little response from readers. Perhaps we should have published more articles of the Joshi type! (Besides, if any living author can withstand the punishment, surely Stephen King is the man.)

Dear Editors:

It was with shock that I noticed in the new edition of *The Encyclopedia of SF* the death of Anthony Roberts. In fact, he had died in 1990. I cannot believe there were no notices alerting the readership to his death. I especially cannot fathom how Interzone could use his artwork for the cover of issue 61, describe it as an excerpt from a forthcoming book, and give no indication that he had even passed away. Long have my friends and I wondered why there has never been a Tony Roberts artbook. Can you tell me whether one will now proceed?

For my friends and I, Tony Roberts was the sf artist of the 70s. Even through the 80s his work was superior to the commercialism of all the Jim Burns clones; with only Bruce Pennington as his rival. My hope for any beauty to stock the virtual reality of sf icons has now gone. In sf we are now starved of rich images. The iconography has been stripped bare. Now we have retreated inside a cocoon of exhausted images. Deprived of Tony Roberts, I have become sad. He was a genuine once-in-a-lifetime artist and we will miss him.

Petri Sinda

Perth, Australia

Editor: Happily, it does appear that Messrs Clute and Nicholls have nodded on this occasion. I'm pleased to be able to tell you that artist Tony Roberts is alive and well and living just a couple of miles from this editorial office. It seems the encyclopedia editors confused him with some other Anthony Roberts who died in 1990. Our Tony Roberts was born in 1950 (not 1940) and is indeed the same illustrator whom you praise so highly. Now he has had the very odd experience, like Mark Twain, of reading reports of his death which have been greatly exaggerated.

All Singing, All Dancing

Amy Wolf

You did what?" Irving Tannenbaum reached for the ulcer pills he always carried with him.

"I bought Fred Astaire's hat for six thousand dollars. It's a steal!" Sheila's zaftig body broke into a little dance.

Irving rushed over to a water fountain and sucked down pills like Jujubes. He'd rather be anywhere than at the Avco Cinema, site of this MGM auction.

"Irving, here it is! Isn't this exciting?" Sheila cornered him by the concession stand. Irving didn't know which was worse: the smell of butter flavouring, or the sight of a black silk top hat, locked away in its glass case. The same hat Astaire had worn in *The Bandwagon*, a movie Sheila had just made him see. The thought of Cyd Charisse on pointe still gave him vertigo.

"Isn't this wonderful?" Sheila breathed at him, her too-big hair poking his cheek.

Irving forced a smile. Why had he let Sheila drag him here? Why didn't he scream that she'd blown half of his money — they had a joint account — on something he hated?

Better keep quiet. If he made Sheila mad, he'd never find another fiancée.

Irving dragged home the next night and flicked on his living-room lights. All was as it should be: zebra-striped couch, white area rug, black-and-white TV set. Only one element jarred: that damned hat.

You take it, Sheila had told him after the auction. You're the one with the security building. She'd put its case on a tall wooden stand, smack in the centre of the room. God forbid, the only things missing were candles and a Cross.

Irving went over to the hat, talking to it through the glass. "You cost me three grand, and I don't like musicals. I hate musicals."

He thought back to his Aunt Sally, dragging him to the Fox for Saturday matinees, making him sit through Rodgers and Hammerstein, *The Happiest Millionaire*. What kind of life was that for a kid?

The rage of 34 years boiled up inside him. He ran over to his closet and pulled out a hammer. The wooden grip felt good in his hands as he smashed the glass, making a sound like tinkling ice. Irving yanked the hat through the jagged opening.

"Stupid thing!" he yelled. "Stupid, non-essential thing!"

The hat attacked him. It broke out of his hands, floated over his head, and released a thin, trailing ribbon of colour: yellow, cyan, magenta. The ribbon

whizzed around Irving like a rainbow on a jailbreak, tickling every inch of his body until he actually started to laugh.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "Stop it!"

The rainbow-ribbon obeyed. It lifted the hat by the brim, flew out his closed window, and disappeared.

Irving decided he needed some air, so he walked to the park around the corner. It was nice: red-brick paths, shady trees. He'd always wanted to take his dog there, but he didn't have one.

Irving tried not to think about the ribbon. He sat down on a green bench across from a marble fountain. It was not a beautiful sight: the fountain had been turned off for years, and the low rainwater collected in its basin was dark and covered with leaf-layers. Irving liked the sculpted angels peering out from the base: they had a classic Thirties look.

The orchestra came up.

Not a bunch of guys marching over with instruments, but "came up" in the sense that music came up, behind a movie.

Irving dug his palms into the bench.

The music swelled. Lush strings, ballsy brass, full-throated woods, and he could feel the rhythm of "A Fine Romance" thumping through his chest.

A couple appeared.

They floated above the fountain as the park went black-and-white. Aunt Sally would have plotted: the couple were Fred and Ginger.

They danced, sometimes in each other's arms, sometimes apart, the curve of a hand or the nod of a head conveying more than a scriptful of words. He wore his trademark top hat and tails; she was gowned in sparkling white, her hem fanning over her heels. They took their bows in front of Irving, but no applause was necessary. It would be like applauding moonlight.

They left.

Irving dug splinters out of his palms. The world returned to colour, what little was left in the fading light; instead of music, he heard the rustle of leaves on water.

Pills. That was it. What were they putting in ulcer medicine? Irving got up to go. Musicals stank, but Fred and Ginger he could live with. As long as they weren't in colour.

The next day at Bain Advertising began like any other. Irving rushed past Miss What's-Her-Name at the front desk. Her bright red hair and brown-striped suit made her look like a tropical fish.

"Morning, Mr Tannenbaum."

Irving grunted, swinging into his cubicle.

"Irv!" Ted Buchanan, Irving's new boss, shouted from across the hall. "I need Bug: The Movie! numbers ASAP!"

Irving was sorry he'd thrown out his pills, especially when What's-Her-Name walked in. Irving had never seen her standing up before.

"Mr Tannenbaum?"

"Yes?"

She looked down dramatically, then burst into song. She had a fine soprano.

*Mr Tannenbaum, I'm so tired of being ignored.
I sit at the front desk every day,
Unchallenged and lonely and bored....*

She stopped. Irving guessed this was some kind of Intro. Then, his cubicle exploded. With colour. Miss What's-Her-Name's red hair now made carrot juice look pale; her brown suit became a hip-hugging orange, and she seemed to be wearing tap shoes.

The orchestra came up. Big, swingy, heavy on the brass.

Irving winced as the receptionist draped a leg over his desk, singing:

*Don't call me Miss What's-Her-Name!
How do you think that makes me feel?
I don't call you Mr What's-His-Name,
I'm a person, and a person who's real!*

"Please," said Irving.

The receptionist struck a dancey pose, right hip thrust out, tap shoes pointed, and shoulders shimmying.

*My name is Ida Teitlebaum,
In case you got that wrong,
That's I, that's D, that's A, that's T
And add an Eitlebaum.
I know you think I'm a bimbo,
Not true, I'm here to say.
I graduated magna cum laude
In English from U-C-L-A...*

Her right hip thrust out even farther. Irving steeled himself for an encore, but instead, she danced out of his cubicle, somehow tapping on the thick red carpet, which faded back to its former grey.

Irving got up. He half-jogged to the reception area to see Miss Teitlebaum sitting there, reading Ivanhoe, looking perfectly normal in her brown suit and not-unaturally-bright red hair.

"Hello, Mr Tannenbaum," she said.

"Hello, Ida." The words were out before he could stop them.

She put down her book and smiled.

Irving, why are you so nervous?" Sheila stared at him across an IHOP table the next morning.

"Uh...stress. Buchanan's been driving me like a slave." Irving hoped he sounded convincing.

"That Buchanan's not so bad. There must be something else. Irrvvvving?"

"Just leave me alone, OK?" Irving knew he sounded like an adolescent. Like an adolescent, he wanted to throw a pitcher of maple syrup at her. God, he hated Sheila. No, that wasn't right: he loved her.

"Irving, tell the man what you want."

A friendly, bearded waiter stood by.

"International Passport Breakfast, hold the pancakes."

"Mr Tannenbaum?"

"Huh?" How did this hirsute fellow know his name?

"Mr Tannenbaum, would you like sugar or cream with your coffeeeee?"

Irving put his head in his hands. The waiter was singing, and his white uniform had turned a deep shade of aqua. The IHOP went fluorescent, with green neon tubes snaking up and down the walls.

An orchestra entered, carrying their instruments. They tuned up as the waiter continued:

"Mr Tannenbaum, you're such an utter and complete asshole, I should take this pot of fresh-brewed coffee and pour it all over your headddd!"

Nice baritone. When people sang to Irving, at least they were good.

The potted palms parted. Irving didn't know there were potted palms, but a line of dancing pancakes stepped out from behind them. They were getting ready to kick.

INTERIOR INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PANCAKES, MORNING

ANGLE - SHEILA FADES from IRVING's view as he tenses over the table. The WAITER segues into "Don't Be A Schmuck, Irving," an upbeat ditty heavy on the drums. IRVING SCREAMS.

WAITER

*Don't be a schmuck, Irving,
Does everything go over your head?
Don't be a schmuck, Irving,
Be a winner, a mensh, instead!*

WALL OF PANCAKES

*(Dipping)
As if you could!*

WAITER

*Drop that horrible woman.
Open your eyes, and turn on the light!
Don't ya know Ida from Portland,
Is for you, it's love at first sight?*

WALL OF PANCAKES

*(Kicking, Rockettes-style)
Why don't you listen?*

WAITER

Or you're gonna end up a trog-lo-dyyttee!

WALL OF PANCAKES

*(Kicking; hands on shoulders)
You're half-way therrrre...*

LOW ANGLE - The PANCAKES TAKE OFF like flying saucers as the ORCHESTRA EXITS. Everything goes back to NORMAL. SHEILA FADES UP into IRVING's view.

"Sheila." Irving reached for the pill bottle that wasn't there. "I need to leave. I'm not feeling well."

Sheila gave him a strange look as he staggered to the door. Had the waiter been right about Ida? Did the pancakes have a point? Irving was sure about one thing: he'd just witnessed his First Act Finale.

Irving slunk back to the office, armed with Pepto-Bismol. He took a swig, but by five o'clock, he relaxed: there'd been no singing, no dancing.

"Irv!" Buchanan entered his cubicle, smug in a navy tie. "Bain doesn't like the font you're using. When I was in B-school at Yale..."

Irving tuned out. He, Irving Tannenbaum, should've made Manager. He'd done his time. Buchanan was an outsider, a stuck-up preppie brat.

"You don't understand me," said Buchanan.

"Huh?" Was he still fixated on fonts?

"You can't know what churns inside me, how I got this way. How I wrestle with my demons, day after endless day."

Irving could feel a song coming on.

INTERIOR BAIN ADVERTISING AGENCY, DAY

WE SEE the cubicle FADE to a soft, inviting pink as BUCHANAN's suit turns bluer than his tie. SPOTLIGHT ON BUCHANAN. A lonely SAX rents the air while HE sings, in a fine tenor:

BUCHANAN

You'll never know, how I suffer inside.
What's really shyness, you see as pride.
You'll never know, how unhappy I feel,
Each time I see you,
I feel like pig swill.

IRVING

(from the shadows)
Why?

BUCHANAN

You'll never know, how my father ignored me,
Gave me a Porsche,
Then to Yale he whored me.
I've never been loved,
So I act like a slob.
And right now I feel bad,
Cause I took your job.

Lights and colours FADE DOWN. BUCHANAN can't go on. IRVING puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Jeez, Ted..."

Buchanan shook him off. "Just use Helvetica, OK?"

"Sure. I'll try to help you out."

Buchanan smiled before hurrying down the hall. "Thanks."

Irving shook his head. He felt like he really knew Buchanan. As he loosened his tie, he even hummed a few bars of "You'll Never Know."

The next day was a holiday. It was Somebody's Birthday, and Irving was glad. He walked to the park with Sheila, his dog at his side. He'd bought one, a cocker spaniel, and named her Cyd.

"I don't know, Irving," said Sheila, lumbering through the grass. "A dog, for what? The mess, the walking..."

"She's good company."

"And what's with that shirt you got on? Suddenly you're Don Ho?"

It was true. Irving sported a bright Hawaiian shirt.

"Something's come over you, and I don't like it. One minute you're miserable, then you're at a luau. I don't understand..."

Irving stopped before the marble fountain. "I do."

"Huh?"

"I've been lying to myself since I was a kid! I can see it now, crystal clear in front of me: For 22 years, I've lived in a box. I used to like musicals, down at the Fox. Do you hear me, Sheila? I like musicals!"

The rainbow-ribbon heard, from wherever it was hiding. It sprinkled Irving with colour, turning his shirt purple, his socks yellow, and his eyes blue. It was time, at last. For his Second Act Finale.

EXTERIOR PARK, SOMEBODY'S BIRTHDAY, AFTERNOON

The GRASS is greener than green; BLACK KIDS playing basketball wear red tunics and redder high-tops; CYD THE DOG has pink ears and a chartreuse tail. Only SHEILA is in black-and-white.

IRVING

Sheila?

SHEILA

Huh?

IRVING

(strong)
"I Need to Break Free!"

SHEILA

Take your medicine, Irving.

IRVING

No, I won't, it's a bitter cup!

BASKETBALL PLAYERS

Word to your mother, honey, tell her wass'up!

IRVING hesitates. HE stutters, clears his throat, then decides to GO FOR IT. IRVING opens his mouth to sing, in a shaky alto:

IRVING

I need to break free,
Undo my cuffs,
Six years of tsuris,
Enough is enough!

SHEILA

What, are you crazy?

IDA

(materializing in ORANGE; to Sheila)
You horrible witch, you just want a ring,
You don't understand him, or why he must sing!

SHEILA

Irving, who is this woman?

IRVING

(nervously; to Ida)
I'm no Howard Keel,
My chance is remote,
I want to join with you,
And form a zygote.

IDA

(extending her hands)

That's all right, Irving, your looks I won't mock,
I've had my share of...insensitive jocks!
The fact that your short, have glasses and wheeze,
Is to me a real turn-on: your bald spot a tease!

IRVING

(taking her hand)

Then you'll marry me,
Become a different "baum"?

IDA

I will, Irving, to share a life in song!

SHEILA SHRIEKS as IRVING and IDA EMBRACE. BUCHANAN appears, in BLUE, and takes SHEILA's hand.

BUCHANAN

Sheila, you're the woman I've been looking for all my life!

CYD THE DOG

(eyeing her)
You're kidding.

The TWO COUPLES walk arm-in-arm toward the gushing FOUNTAIN, where folds of white satin form a backdrop like an ALTAR.

IRVING seems nonplussed to see THE GHOST OF HIS AUNT SALLY presiding, or the fact that FRED is his Best Man, and GINGER is IDA's Maid of Honour.

The fountain ANGELS WARBLE, CYD BARKS, and the BASKETBALL PLAYERS serve as guests at this impromptu double wedding.

FRED winks at IRVING, smiling his easy smile, throwing his TOP HAT through the air. It lands on IRVING's head, releasing a long trailing ribbon – yellow, cyan, magenta – covering the whole park, maybe the whole world, in glorious, eye-popping Technicolor as we:

FADE UP AND OUT.

Amy Wolf lives in Tarzana, California (a town named after an sf writer's famous creation). She works in a technical capacity in the Hollywood film industry and has written many short stories in her spare time, mainly for small-press magazines. The above is her first piece for Interzone.

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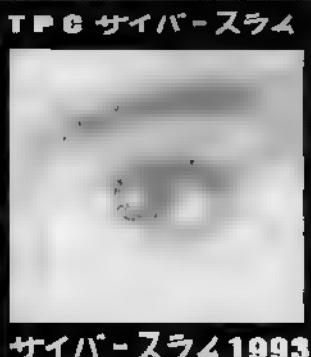
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Anne Rice: The Philosophy of Vampirism

by S.T. Joshi

In 1976 Anne Rice (born 1941) published *Interview with the Vampire*, which surprisingly became a bestseller. After writing two mainstream novels, *The Feast of All Saints* (1980) and *Cry to Heaven* (1982), she has written three sequels to her first novel, *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), and *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992). She has also published two other horror novels, *The Mummy; or, Ramses the Damned* (1989) and *The Witching Hour* (1990), two mainstream novels under the pseudonym Anne Rampling, and three volumes of soft-core pornography (tactfully labelled "erotica") under the name A.N. Roquelaure.

Rice is worth considering in the context of modern weird fiction if for no other reason than that her first novel is strikingly original and evocative. She resembles Shirley Jackson in the sense (and only in the sense) that she is approaching the field from the realm of mainstream literature and does not appear to be especially familiar with the long history of weird fiction, even specifically of the fiction of vampirism which she has explored so voluminously in her own work. As a result, her writing exhibits a number of traits characteristic of the mainstream experimenter in the weird: a concern not so much with the weird phenomenon itself as with its function and ramifications in a network of human relationships; an originality of conception and treatment born, curiously, of a lack of awareness of the many similar works in the field; and a lush, richly textured, almost florid style, but a style in no way derived from Lovecraft, Machen, Dunsany, Shiel, or other masters of weird prose.

Interview with the Vampire is a remarkable piece of writing. The premise — a vampire in modern-day San Francisco agrees to be interviewed on tape and tells the story of his two centuries of existence — does not sound especially prepossessing, and indeed the novel is not so much a narrative as a series of often striking set-pieces and tableaux. The Frenchman Louis (we are never told his last name here) became a vampire at the age of 25 in 1791 after he had moved to Louisiana. The process by which he becomes a vampire, at the hands of the vampire

Lestat, is arresting: he is nearly drained of blood, then is forced to drink the vampire's blood, now mixed with his own, from the vampire's wrist. This entire process seems to be a transparent metaphor for homosexual love, and in some senses it is exactly that:

"...he lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover. I recoiled. But he put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest...I wanted to struggle, but he pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check; and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck."

A much later passage bears this out even more clearly: "Never had I felt this, never had I experienced it, this yielding of a conscious mortal...He was pressing the length of his body against me now, and I felt the hard strength of his sex beneath his clothes pressing against my leg." But there is always more to the procedure than mere sex, as Louis learns in the end: "For vampires, physical love culminates and is satisfied in one thing, the kill".

What Rice must first establish is the nature and functions of her vampires. Perhaps because she is not thoroughly versed in the literature of vampirism, she dispenses with some of the standard vampiric traits with insouciance. It is true that her vampires must go about only at night, but it is symptomatic of her writing that Louis responds to this not with horror but with pathos when he sees the sun rise for the last time: "I said good-bye to the sunrise and went out to become a vampire". Analogously, Lestat informs him scornfully that other traditions of the vampire — fear of the cross, ability to turn to smoke, death by the driving of a stake through the heart — are all "bullshit". What is more, vampires need not sustain themselves merely on human beings: animals can serve the purpose just as well. In *The Vampire Lestat* several other conventional traits of the vampire are done away with: vampires can now see themselves in mirrors; they need not spend the days in coffins filled with the earth of their native land — any resting-place will suffice, even the ground.

But what makes *Interview with the Vampire* so unclassifiable — what makes it fit very uneasily into either the realm of weird fiction or that of mainstream fiction — is, firstly, its emphasis on the vibrant and sensual physical sensations of being a vampire (sensations that cannot be seen as mere metaphors for normal human states) and, secondly, its moral disquisitions on the nature of vampirism and the inevitable bloodletting caused by such a state. I am not sure that any portion of the novel is horrifying or frightening in any real sense, even though we read nearly the whole of it with a certain awed fascination.

Consider Louis' first sight of the vampire:

"...the moment I saw him, saw his extraordinary aura and knew him to be no creature I'd ever known, I was reduced to nothing. That ego which could not accept the presence of an extraordinary human being in its midst was crushed. All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot myself!"

This is rather uncannily similar to that perception of the supernatural which shatters the psyches of so many of Lovecraft's characters, but it is here bereft of any sensation of fear. Similarly, a later scene — in which a little girl, Claudia, is turned into a vampire — must rank as one of the most stunning tableaux in modern weird fiction, and yet it too contains more of pathos and eroticism than of horror:

"Where is Mamma?" asked the child softly. She had a voice equal to her physical beauty, clear like a little silver bell. It was sensual. She was sensual... I found her on my lap, my arms around her, feeling again how soft she was, how plump her skin was, like the skin of warm fruit, plums warmed by sunlight; her huge luminescent eyes were fixed on me with trusting curiosity. "This is Louis, and I am Lestat," he said to her, dropping down beside her. She looked about and said that it was a pretty room, very pretty, but she wanted her mamma."

Being a vampire is an anomalous condition: one was once human but is no longer so; one must subsist by killing. Louis, who can never forget his former humanness, reflects plaintively

on his condition: "...I...had presided over the death of my own body, seeing all I called human wither and die only to form an unbreakable chain which held me fast to this world yet made me forever its exile, a specter with a beating heart". Louis had earlier maintained that he had experienced a "divorce from human emotions", but it is obvious that this is more a wish than a reality. It is Lestat, perhaps because of his longer tenure in the vampiric state, who asserts the amorality of vampirism:

"We are immortal. And what we have before us are the rich feasts that conscience cannot appreciate and mortal men cannot know without regret. God kills, and so shall we; indiscriminately He takes the richest and the poorest, and so shall we, for no creatures under God are as we are, none so like Him as ourselves, dark angels not confined to the stinking limits of hell but wandering His earth and all its kingdoms."

But let us not be deceived at the transparently religious symbolism in this speech of Lestat's; not only is he doubtful of God's existence (hence Satan's), he is openly atheistic. Louis claims to be so ("God did not live in this church; these statues gave an image to nothingness. I was the supernatural in this cathedral. I was the only supernatural thing that stood conscious under this roof!"), but cannot bring himself to accept this belief wholeheartedly. He is shattered by a later conversation with an old vampire in Europe:

"Then God does not exist...you have no knowledge of His existence?"

"None," he said.

"No knowledge!" I said it again, unafraid of my simplicity, my miserable human pain.

"None."

"And no vampire here has discourse with God or with the devil!"

"No vampire that I've ever known," he said, musing, the fire dancing in his eyes. "And as far as I know today, after four hundred years, I am the oldest living vampire in the world."

An amusing passage in *The Vampire Lestat* seems to clinch the matter:

"What if they're right," she said. "And we don't belong in the House of God."

"Gibberish and nonsense. God isn't in the House of God."

This leads Louis to a quasi-humanist position:

"Because if God doesn't exist we are the creatures of highest consciousness in the universe. We alone understand the passage of time and the value of every minute of human life. And what constitutes evil, real evil, is the taking of a single human life. Whether a man would have died tomorrow or the day after or eventually...it doesn't matter. Because if God does not exist, this life...every second of it...is all we have."

I shall refrain from harping upon the obvious fallacy of that first sentence.

The substance of Interview with the Vampire derives from its richly sensual and evocative prose and its probing of complex metaphysical and emotional issues dealing with the vampiric state. The tortured Louis, by turns coldly cynical and pitifully human, is a fine creation, although perhaps the child-vampire Claudia, who as she continues her unnatural existence maintains the pristine innocence of her little girl's body but becomes morally more ruthless and savage than either Louis or even Lestat, is perhaps a still greater triumph of conception and characterization. The sheer vitality of this novel ought to make it survive in spite of its somewhat rambling structure and slight repetitiveness.

Where Interview with the Vampire fails is in its portrayal of the historic backdrop against which the action is presumably set. Louis has been on the earth for more than 200 years and 200 of the most eventful years of human history – but he seems to have gained remarkably little insight as a result of his long existence upon two continents. After spending the first 70 or so years of his vampiric life in Louisiana, he and Claudia make their way to the France of Napoleon III: it appears that the American Civil War came and went without his noticing it. Louis remarks at one point that "I had now lived in two centuries, seen the illusions of the one utterly shattered by the other, been eternally young and eternally ancient, possessing no illusions", but nothing in his account justifies such a cocksure opinion. It is in this absence of historical perspective that Rice's novels in general suffer by comparison with those of Les Daniels. It would be facile to say that this somehow points to a difference between the male perspective, focusing upon the realities of political and social history, and the female perspective, emphasizing emotional values; it is more likely that Rice simply doesn't know as much about history as Daniels, who always researches the historical settings of his novels with scrupulous care. Kathy Mackay, in an interview with Rice, notes in reference to *The Feast of All Saints* (a novel begun prior to Interview but completed and published later), "She found that as soon as she tried to write about these people [the Creoles of New Orleans], she didn't know enough about the 19th century and her writing didn't work."¹ It does not appear as if she had remedied the fault with Interview.

And yet, as if conscious of this failing, Rice makes The Vampire Lestat more explicitly embedded in the very wide-ranging historical epochs in which it is set. Some rank this novel still higher than Interview, but I am not one of them. It is true that it not so much follows up on as subsumes and

envelops its predecessor, but to my mind it already reveals that long-windedness and excessive fondness for her own voice and her own creations which mar most of Rice's later works. This novel is narrated entirely by Lestat, whom we find in San Francisco in 1984 in the rather charming role of a rock star. Right from the beginning Lestat reflects at great length upon the differences between the 18th and the 20th centuries, in the course of which he makes a number of statements ("In fact the poverty and filth that had been common in the big cities of the earth since time immemorial were almost completely washed away" which make us highly sceptical of his – and Rice's – grasp of historical reality. (And what are we to make of the fact that a review of a play in the time of Mozart is cited from the Spectator, a paper that came and went half a century earlier?) Unfortunately, Rice does not allow Lestat to elaborate upon his rock stardom, a potentially interesting subject,² but instead compels him to tell at appalling length the not very compelling story of his life from childhood to vampirism. I fail to understand the significance or value of much of this narrative, especially as there seem to be no new conceptions developed here. There is some interest provided when Lestat transforms his own mother, Gabrielle, into a vampire, after which time they become pseudo-lovers; but otherwise we have heard it all before in Interview. Indeed, the portrayal of Lestat here is not even consistent with that in Interview, as he gains that same tormented moralism ("I can live without God. I can even come to live with the idea there is no life after. But I do not think I could go on if I did not believe in the possibility of goodness") which typified Louis in Interview but which Lestat entirely repudiated. Perhaps we are to understand that all vampires, in the infancy of their vampirism, are afflicted with human morality until the decades and centuries finally bludgeon it out of them.

Interest in the novel finally appears toward its conclusion, in which Rice attempts something no less grandiose than a sort of origin of species for vampires. Marius, a Roman vampire who has lived for nearly two millennia, stumbles upon the mother and father of all vampires in Egypt, Akasha and Enkil, who are the real figures behind the myth of Isis and Osiris. It transpires that the lives of all the vampires in the world depend upon the continued existence of this pair – or, more specifically, of Akasha, who seems to have vastly greater power than her consort. The convoluted but riveting tale Rice spins here, after 400 pages, is indeed worth the wait and comes close to redeeming this otherwise bloated novel. Her writing finally attains the

vibrancy and dynamism we found in Interview, and even Lestat — who through worldweariness buries himself in the ground for much of the 19th century — finds himself at last capable of an interesting historical reflection when he awakens early in this century:

I do not remember when it became the twentieth century, only that everything was uglier and darker, and the beauty I'd known in the old eighteenth-century days seemed more than ever some kind of fanciful idea. The bourgeois ran the world now upon dreary principles and with a distrust of the sensuality and the excess that the ancient regime had so loved.

And the final scene, in which Akasha awakens and apocalyptically disrupts Lestat's rock concert, brings the novel to a fittingly cataclysmic conclusion.

Unfortunately, Rice found herself so enraptured by the figure of Akasha that she brought her back for the interminable Queen of the Damned, a nearly unreadable novel full of angst-ridden maudlinings by various vampires, ponderously prophetic dreams, and an extraordinarily clumsy structure of shifting narrative voices. Rice's writing has now become flabby, verbose, and self-indulgent, and this book's lack of focus, pacing, and ultimate purpose make us blanch when we finally reach the end and see the ominous words on the last page: "The Vampire Chronicles Will Continue."

That continuation took another four years to materialize, and one would be justified, after reading Rice's next two published novels — The Mummy (1989), a silly but entertaining pot-boiler, and The Witching Hour (1990), a staggeringly prolix and pointless non-vampiric horror novel — to be wary of The Tale of the Body Thief (1992). Had Rice completely lost the art of telling a good story? Had best-sellerism laid its heavy hand on her as it has on so many others? It is with some relief that one can announce that The Tale of the Body Thief, while by no means the best of Rice's novels, ably picks up the thread of Interview with the Vampire and The Vampire Lestat and, remarkably enough, actually introduces a new idea in the Vampire Chronicles.

That new idea is personality exchange. It is, of course, not in fact new in the history of weird fiction, and Rice herself is aware of it: in the early parts of the novel her human protagonist Raglan James slyly presents Lestat, who narrates the entire novel in the first person, with various horror tales (Lovecraft's "The Thing on the Doorstep," Robert Bloch's "Eyes of the Mummy") and films (Vice Versa, All of Me) which, as Lestat finally deduces, all deal with the swapping of personalities. James, it appears, has



Anne Rice

the ability to effect this exchange if he has a willing partner; and much of the early part of the novel is spent in his attempts to seduce — the word is not too strong — Lestat into agreeing to this exchange.

Lestat, now a vampire for several centuries, yearns for the human form and the human condition. Would it not be a delight to see the sun again, to eat fine food and drink the best wines, to have sex with men or women — to be, in other words, once again a part of the human race instead of a loathed outsider? Lestat agrees to switch bodies with James for a mere two days, with the possibility of a longer exchange if he likes the human state; and, in spite of vehement objections from his human friend David Talbot, he performs the exchange. And the inevitable happens: James "steals" his

body, vanishing and leaving Lestat in a strong, handsome, but unfamiliar and uncomfortable human form.

If being a vampire is anomalous, Lestat has forgotten how many inconveniences the human condition has: the finest food tastes like sand or dirt, wine is a poor substitute for blood, and the tedious human necessities of eating, sleeping and defecating prove unutterably wearying. Meanwhile Raglan James, in his vampiric state, goes on a murderous rampage while Lestat and Talbot spend the bulk of the novel tracking him down, bearding him on the Queen Elizabeth II and forcing him to switch back to his own form. Some further twists occur hereafter, but they do not add appreciably to the novel's significance.

The Tale of the Body Thief is in part an adventure story, in part a rumination

on God, and in part a sort of modern Gulliver's Travels. If Gulliver, after becoming accustomed to the high civilization of the Houyhnhnms, finds the human form repellent and disgusting, Lestat can see only the brutish side of being mortal. Even sex proves unsatisfying, since he ends up clumsily raping a waitress and failing to persuade his dear friend Talbot to have a homosexual encounter, although Talbot has leanings in that direction. As with Louis in *Interview with the Vampire*, it is only the awesome sight of the sun that reconciles him, momentarily, to being human. But in the end he learns his true nature: "I was Lestat, drifting between hell and heaven, and content to be so -- perhaps for the first time".

One would think that such a novel would allow Rice to make interesting reflections on the nature of identity, but in fact the philosophical substance of the novel lies in the various discussions of God conducted by Lestat, Talbot, and Gretchen, a nun whom Lestat encounters in his human state. Talbot is convinced he has seen God and the Devil talking in a café; Gretchen presents a vigorous defence of altruism: "'God may or may not exist. But misery is real. It is absolutely real, and utterly undeniable. And in that reality lies my commitment -- the core of my faith. I have to do something about it!'. Lestat provisionally accepts Talbot's vision, and is also momentarily shaken out of his cynicism by Gretchen's devotion; but in the end he reverts to his old atheistic self, discounting Talbot's account and even making Gretchen confess that there is no God. It is not clear what relevance these theological discussions have to the core of the novel, but they are admirably well presented.

As with all her novels, *The Tale of the Body Thief* works best as a succession of striking images: the exchange of personalities between James and Lestat, involving their respective souls floating up out of their own bodies and plunging like divers into each other's torpid form; the spectacular dream or hallucination sequences Lestat experiences when he falls ill in his human state, as he conducts bizarre dialogues with the spirit of Claudia; the account of Talbot's experiences amongst primitive magicians in Brazil; and, toward the last, Lestat's search (in his own body) for Gretchen in the jungles of South America, only to be rejected by her as a monster and abomination. This novel has a somewhat better sense of narrative pacing than some of Rice's previous works, but it too goes on a little too long.

In *The Vampire Lestat* there is a mention of the "vampire Ramses", but much later Marius corrects this impression, declaring that Ramses is

not a vampire at all because he has "never drunk blood" and "can walk in the daylight as well as in the dark". In fact, Ramses is a mummy. I do not know what led Rice to write *The Mummy*, nor do I know whether it is some early, much-rejected novel or one that was written hastily to capitalize upon the success of the *Vampire Chronicles*. The fact that it was published in the USA only in a trade paperback suggests that even her publisher did not feel it worth the dignity of hard covers; and yet, I find it more enjoyable than such overblown and pretentious things as *The Queen of the Damned* or *The Witching Hour*. It is nothing more than a cheap pulp thriller, but an entertaining one for all that. All the characters are stereotypes -- Lawrence Stratford, an explorer singlemindedly devoted to the cause of science; Henry Stratford, his wastrel nephew; Julie Stratford, his feminist daughter determined to carry on her father's mission; Samir Ibrahim, the wise native assistant. Ramses himself is, as it were, the only character who comes alive as a vibrant and complex personality, as perhaps does Elliot, Lord Rutherford, Stratford's friend (and one-time lover) who finds the figure of Ramses powerfully fascinating and plunges himself into the mystery of his existence as one final intellectual thrill at the end of a long and hard life.

Ramses is no dusty and bandage-wrapped relic stalking about blindly and mindlessly. After being revived by the sun, he becomes a compellingly suave and enigmatic figure who easily wins the doting love of Julie, but whose own love for his long-lost Queen Cleopatra is the driving force of his resurrected life. Conveniently enough, Ramses discovers the body of Cleopatra in an Egyptian museum, where it is ignorantly labelled as an anonymous woman of the Graeco-Roman period, and he revives her after a fashion with the elixir by which he himself gained immortality. Unfortunately, Cleopatra's body is not wholly intact, and the resurrected queen is, although physically alluring, essentially a lustful and murderous maniac who goes on a rampage until finally perishing (although in Rice's works one never quite seems to perish) in a railway accident.

All this is great fun, even though much of the novel makes us wince at Rice's ponderous attempts to inspire fear ("What if there were an immortal being under those wrappings?") or romance (Julie on yielding her virginity to Ramses: "'Batter down the door ... The virgin door. Open it, I am yours forever'"). And Ramses' pontifications on the contrast between ancient and modern times are no more interesting than Louis' or Lestat's. I cannot decide whether this novel is meant seriously

or as a parody. If it is meant seriously, then it is simply bad; if it is a parody, then Rice has concealed her intentions rather too well. I am half inclined to think that Rice began the work as a parody (the writing is much poorer, by ordinary standards, at the beginning than at the end), but that, as she warmed to the task and got into the flow of the narrative, she changed her mind and tried to write a serious pulp romantic adventure. But there is no such thing as a serious pulp romantic adventure. *The Mummy* also concludes with the note that the adventures of Ramses the Damned will continue, but to date Rice has failed to do so.

And now we come -- reluctantly -- to *The Witching Hour*. It is the nadir of Rice's works. By now a bestselling author with the assurance that any new work will sell many copies and bring her lots of money, Rice spawned a 965-page novel that goes nowhere and should have been cut by a full two-thirds. By no means should an author so utterly lacking in narrative drive be allowed to write a novel of this length. One might imagine that Rice thinks of herself as an old-time pulpster, getting paid by the word.

The plot of this novel is deceptively simple. A mysterious force or entity named Lasher seems to hang around all the members of the Mayfair family. This is Rice's excuse for undertaking the stupefyingly tedious account of the lives of the "Mayfair witches" from the late 17th century to the present - an account whose utter lack of vital connection with the main narrative, set in the present, is rendered painfully obtrusive by the use of a different typeface. That main narrative is the sentimentalized story of Rowan Mayfair, the latest of the Mayfair clan, and Michael Curry, a young man whom Rowan saved from drowning. At long last, after 850 pages, one finally gets some vague idea of who or what Lasher is: he is a force from some other plane of existence who desperately wishes to become human. He infuses himself into the body of the baby being carried by Rowan, and when he is born -- a man of full stature but with the delicate physique of a baby -- he and Rowan dash off to Europe, leaving Michael disconsolate, full of flatulent philosophical maunderings ("I believe in Free Will, the Force Almighty by which we conduct ourselves as if we were the sons and daughters of a just and wise God, even if there is no such Supreme Being") and waiting for Rowan to return. There is no note that the *Witching Hour* chronicles will continue, but one cannot help fearing

Concluded on page 61

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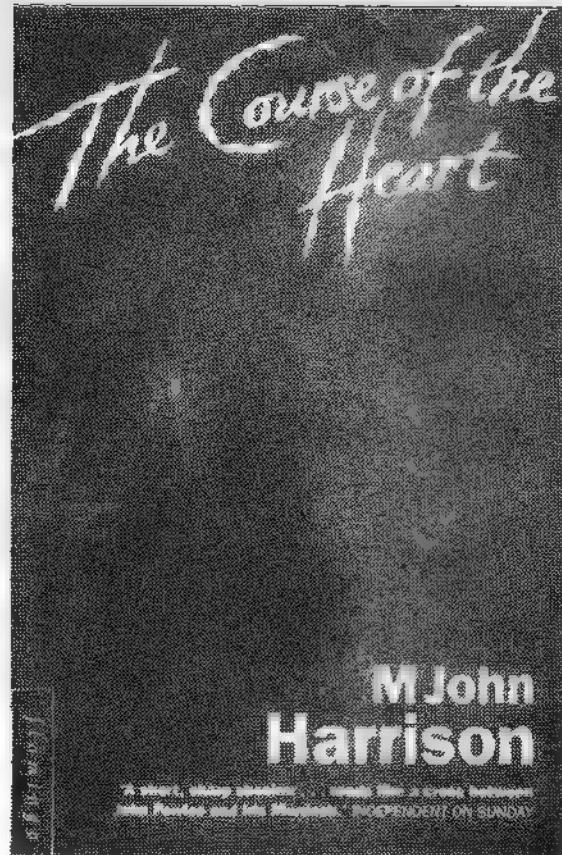
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When he was in his youthful prime, the thirtysomething years beloved by advertising companies, David Milton devoted his life to pushing the revolution, a quaint 1960s ideal of the pastoral alternative. The bands his management company signed up reflected his politics; no pop pap for him, he promoted musicians with causes. It was a shrewd move, for radical youth culture remained a popular cliché at the turn of the century; they sold a lot of albums. He made a great deal of money.

And then it actually happened: a different kind of world blossomed. Adam's vigorous biotechnology usurped the established order just as all the hippy lyrics had prayed for.

David Milton dropped out of the public eye. Not bitter, but resentful and afraid, alienated from the power of the new Green wonders. Poetic justice in a way; so it was only ever going to be a question of time before his past caught up with him.

It took 22 years.

Eve arrived in France on a warm sunny June morning, walking into town under a cornflower blue sky ribbed with faint opalescent cloudbands. They called her Eve now, though to David she would always be Charlotte. Charlotte with the shy smile and uncrushable spirit.

She walked down the middle of the road, out of the heat shimmer's silver and black ripples, a comet's tail of multicoloured butterflies swirling erratically in her wake. Seventeen years old, clad in a simple snow-white sleeveless dress, strands of fair hair waving in the balmy air. The epitome of classic beauty, a girl da Vinci would have paid a king's ransom to paint.

The children saw her first and squealed with excitement. They raced across the shaggy overgrown verges towards her, frightening the butterflies away. There were nine of them; all girls, of course. Even David's only child was a daughter: Kirsten, 18 years old, and just as zippy as her mother had been when they married. He had neither the courage nor stubbornness to fight the battle against gender.

The efficiency with which Adam and his kind were



spreading their biotechnology empire across the globe was quite irresistible. The old mechanized economy was smothering and dying below their genetically adapted creatures and plants. There was no requirement for ordinary boys in such a world, only Adam's sons.

David heard the girls' twittering laughter through his open study window, and voicelined the computer's finance display to hold. His Audio Visual distribution company was just keeping afloat, not that economics as he understood it played much part in modern life. Not with people able to grow almost anything they wanted, from landcoral houses to an entire genealogy of servitor animals, none of which cost anything. But the AV trade had remained reasonably stable over the last 20 years. No matter the physical changes in lifestyle, people would always want entertainment. And there was still all of David's generation left to cater for, the has-beens and real-life refugees, surviving on an AV diet of the regurgitated past. Nostalgia, reliving the dead days, always paid.

The girls were dancing around Eve, guiding her off

the road onto the broad verge. Eve walked slowly, careful not to bump into any of the impromptu côte à côte, a passive smile elevating her delicate lips. She stepped up onto the verge, dew from the ragged grass sprinkling her bare feet. And David could hear the girls singing.

Eve's here to play

Eve's here to stay

Eve'll drive the past away

Grow Eve grow

One of the new nursery rhymes, more truthful than any of those it replaced.

Eve stopped in the centre of the verge, ten yards from the entrance to David's drive. Her eyelids closed, and the girls whooped for joy, their dancing redoubling in vigour, frilly skirts billowing, arms flapping.

From where he was the figure appeared as a blank doll. But distance didn't mean anything; 22 years ago David could still sketch in every feature of that adolescent temptress face.

In the late afternoon, when the ecstatic girls ha-

abandoned their vigil for tea and bed, after all the local adults had shambled past for their surreptitious look, David put the lead on Rusty, his ageing labrador, and sauntered down the drive. Close up, Eve's face set off all the old pangs, those sad middle-aged tingles and thoughts of what might have been. The Grafton Park executives had known what they were doing when they chose her for Adam. Almost, he reminded himself sorrowfully. They understood the equations for lust, and completely forgot about love.

Eve's eyelids remained closed, wisps of hair blowing across her face. It was a shame, he would have liked one last look into those enchanting green eyes. When he glanced down, he saw her toes had already melded together. The soles would be sending their roots down, blind yellow worms burrowing through the soil a hundred times faster than any natural plant.

Rusty was sniffing round her ankles. David was tempted to let him cock his leg on her, a last defiant two-fingered gesture. In the end he was quite relieved he didn't have that kind of worthless spite.

The first time David encountered Charlotte was back in 2007 when he was managing a band called Castlestorm; back when the world was comfortably insane, and solid metal machines performed industry's hard labour. Castlestorm was a five-piece band out of Manchester, playing what he called pixie rock, rehashing the kind of thing Genesis had mastered in the '70s: long meandering tracks, poetic lyrics not quite sung, not quite spoken. He didn't care about the music, they were a good investment, that was all.

The coach was taking Castlestorm to Worksop, the last week of a ten-week UK tour. A rainy night in mid-December, and they were already late. The driver stamped hard on the brakes half a mile after they turned off the A1, right in the middle of nowhere, with a terminally bleak pine forest on either side of the road.

David stormed up to the front as the doors wheezed open. "What the hell have we stopped for?" he demanded.

Adam and Charlotte clambered in out of the dark, misery and gratitude all over their faces. They looked like a pair of East European war refugees; no coats, thick sweaters soaked and sagging, hair plastered down like rats' tails. She was 17, he looked even younger, he certainly didn't need to shave yet.

"Jesus, you've got to be joking, you stopped for a pair of hikers?"

The driver gave him a sullen glance. "They've got a kid."

A bundle of cloth in the girl's arms squirmed slightly, and started to cry.

"Oh hell," David groaned. But it was too late, the band were in the aisle watching him, their faces hardening. Of course, they were into humanitarianism in a big way. Well, so was he, when it didn't interfere with schedules.

"Come and sit back here," Maxine, the lead singer, said to the youngsters. Her eyes locked on David, glaring, defiant. She itched for a chance to unleash all that suppressed fury at him now he was in a minority of one. Maxine, in her black lace Gothic gear, and her straggly raven hair, whom he had bullied into having

an abortion four months ago. Her singing voice was too distinctive to risk losing to motherhood, not now Castlestorm were starting to break.

"Sure, help your bloody selves," he told the youngsters morosely. "Freebie express, this is."

They slithered past him nervously, the aggravated authority figure, dripping cold rainwater down the aisle. The roadies found them dry clothes, and Maxine sat with the baby on her lap and wistful sentiment in her eyes all the way into Worksop.

For the next two decades David was haunted by the question of how history would have turned out if he had just possessed enough common sense to put his foot down and turf them off the coach once they arrived at the concert hall. But he didn't. So Adam and Charlotte and baby Graham stayed on the coach for the rest of the tour. David couldn't be bothered to make an issue of it, not with only six days to go. In any case, they acted like damping rods on Castlestorm, which was no bad thing. The story they blurted helped, strumming the band's collective sympathy chords.

As fantasy went, he had to admit, it was awesome. He would sit halfway down the bus, feet up, eyes closed, listening to their story as the procession of eco-friendly, zero-emission Korean and Australian factories colonizing north Yorkshire unwound past the window.

They were on the run from Grafton Park, they said, a Ministry of Defence genetics facility. And the why of it went like this: At the start of the '90s, when the Cold War ended, and the Tories were selling off government assets to City spivs, Grafton Park was told to Get Real and earn a living. It couldn't be privatized outright, not with the work that went on in some of the labs; but the director was encouraged to set up collaborative ventures with industry. Adam was the result of one such venture, his genes altered when he was a humble zygote, quasi-secret, quasi-legal.

"Those fascist bastards," Don Lock, the lead guitarist, said. "Using a military lab to screw around with human life. If we break this to the press the defence minister will have to resign; nobody could stand a scandal this size."

"The Prime Minister too," Maxine cried. "He's bound to be a part of it."

Don Lock grinned. "Maybe they'll be forced into a vote of confidence at Westminster."

"And they lose! We could do it, we could make it happen," she said.

David's lips twitched in a silent smile below his wrap-round shades as Castlestorm planned their putsch. Rock stars really shouldn't be allowed out into the real world, it was far too complicated and dangerous. He sometimes wondered if Don actually knew it was illegal to pick up girls under 16.

And it seemed as though he wasn't the only one who knew that the band's collective mental age probably wouldn't make it into double figures. When it came to playing on the conspiracy-theory paranoia which ran through Castlestorm, Adam was a master. God alone knew how a 15-year old kid could think up such a convoluted fairy tale and make it consistent. But he did, and it worked, because Castlestorm wanted to believe. It fitted their world view, where the CIA and Big Business formed the devil's alliance,

and went out gunning for democracy, clotting up the biosphere with nuclear pollution, and making people pay too much for lead-free petrol and CDs.

David knew the doctrine well enough; he had believed himself, once. That was what the music was born for, to fight, to bring a better world into being. The dream of renewal. Elvis and the Beatles struggling against the stifling know-your-place conformities of the '50s and early '60s; Dylan and the Grateful Dead had Vietnam to spark off. Then by the time the Pistols and the Clash gobbed all over the supergroups' complacency it was turning in on itself, it wasn't a movement any more, it wasn't about saving the world, filling the cosmos with peace, it was about royalties and deals. The establishment struck back and won. Effortlessly. Performers became stars, and the bands churned out conveyor-belt music. The message got lost, or abandoned, among the sponsorship tie-ins. Rock was entertainment, newer than Sinatra and Glenn Miller and Mozart, more fashionable, but no different. The flower children and the punks didn't have an alternative to offer after all. Because there was no alternative, not to modern medicine and electricity and centrally heated houses and telecommunications, only what the world had taken 20 centuries to crawl up out of, medieval squalor. The system, the hated, despicable, ridiculed system devised by money lenders and politicians, worked. Not particularly well, but there was nothing else. Wet, freezing tepee communes in Wales, scabby kids sleeping in their own excrement? You could keep that, he thought. The dream wasn't dead, it had never lived; a stillborn chimaera, pickled in acid.

David could remember the exact moment when he realized what a sham it all was, that the hype and the self-importance had become to the stars what the stars were to the fans. The Nelson Mandela gig at Wembley, when he was 20, a junior record company gofer, making sure the stars' mineral water was the right temperature. Mandela had spoken to a select respectful backstage audience. The moment they'd fought and waited for, their Cause in the flesh. And the first thing he said was, "I don't know who you all are."

David didn't hear the rest of it, he ran outside and laughed and laughed. The look on their faces!

Kirsten Milton rode home on the six-legged piebald hansom her father had given her for her 16th birthday. Its hindquarters bubble membrane had unfurled so that Joanne, Stephanie and Nicola could sit in the passenger recess, leaving Thomas to sit beside her on the shoulder saddles above the forelegs. She enjoyed Thomas's company, he was a year older than her and the other girls, bright and sensitive, but so soulful. It seemed as though the only time he ever smiled was on one of those long lazy afternoons when they all piled upstairs into a bedroom, and the four of them took it in turns to bounce up and down on top of him. But even then he was always their lover, never their stud.

Sometimes she tried to imagine how a man would feel about being out-evolved, consigned to genetic obsolescence. Tried and failed.

They talked about him occasionally, the four girls, when he wasn't about, wondering if they should have a daughter for him: a charity act, giving him some

sense of purpose. A straight-genotype daughter wouldn't be so out of place even this close to the passing of the old world. And the sperm gender filter kits were still on sale at the local chemist. One day they even went so far as to cut four lengths of string, but never quite had the nerve to make the draw. In their hearts, they knew they were waiting for Adam's immaculate sons to arrive and fill their wombs with fresh and exciting life, making them part of the new society.

They were cantering down the road, a hundred yards from the house, when Kirsten saw Eve standing outside the driveway, partially occluded by the dusky shadows thrown by the avenue's elegant trees. She ordered the hansom to halt, its clattering hooves the only sound in the twilight serenity.

Eve was always the first wave of the new tide to arrive. Kirsten had seen Eve many times before, when she had been down south visiting her mother in Nottingham. Eve was a walking womb, rooting herself into the soil and blossoming, fruiting some marvellous new species. Then the rest of Adam's creations would follow, to be absorbed by the community. Slowly, gently, spreading out from his headquarters in Kent. Adam wasn't stupid, he could empathize with the need older people had for time to adapt, to adjust their lives. There was even talk of establishing reserves; aboriginal flora, aboriginal lifestyles, aboriginal resentment of change. People like Dad, a tiny sad voice sounded inside her head.

The hansom crouched down, its big wedge-shaped head angling round to look at Eve, and they all climbed down. Thomas had a terrible defeated slump to his shoulders. Kirsten pretended not to notice.

There were towns and cities where the first Eves to appear had been fire-bombed, down south, years past. The news programmes had carried images of parks with long ranks of black human shapes blazing like tarred torches, melting and contorting, shooting thick twisted streamers of soot into the air and radiating the stink of charred flesh until they sickened and shamed the old reactionaries. Kirsten didn't think anything like that would happen in Francet. Nothing ever happened in Francet. The town was built on a solid bedrock of boredom.

They examined Eve closely; her feet had deliquesced to saucer-like pads with small buttress roots flaring out from her ankles, her dress with the texture of a petal was fraying around the hem, the skin had turned a lovely walnut brown, striking a sharp contrast with her hair.

"What will she be, do you think?" Joanne asked.

"A hansom," Stephanie said wistfully. David Milton had brought Kirsten's back with him from London. Her family still used an electric car.

"House chimps," Thomas said. "Adam always starts with something insidiously helpful, something you can't ignore. There's a lot of old people in Francet who could do with a hand around the home."

Kirsten went indoors to find her father in the lounge, a third of the way through a bottle of five-star brandy, tears glistening on his cheeks. He had slotted an AV memory chip in the player, the wallscreen was showing a 22-year-old video of Castlestomp performing "Daydream Revolt," their last ever song. He always watched it when he was maudlin and depressed.

"She hasn't changed," he said brokenly to his daughter. "Not one little bit. Jesus, why did Adam have to use Charlotte as a model?"

"Because he loves her," she answered automatically. Everybody knew that. Then his words registered. "What do you mean, hasn't changed?"

"That's how she was when I first met them. Do you know how old that makes me feel? How sodding useless?"

"You knew them?" she asked incredulously. "Adam and Charlotte?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, Kris, I should have told you before. Couldn't, too many memories." He took another gulp of brandy. Up on the screen a black lace strap fell from Maxine's pearl-white shoulder, shifting her dress to a dangerous angle.

Kirsten couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her own father knew Adam, had spoken to him! "What were they like?"

By the time Castlestorm played their last gig in Newark, David was reconsidering his position on the two youngsters. Simply put: they were adorable. He watched the fuss Sandy and Tiffany, the two backing singers, made over Adam every time he was around. The boy had a sun-god face, baby-smooth skin, mesomorph physique. They couldn't keep their hands off him. There was serious teen-idol potential there.

Then there was this crazy story of theirs. They had stuck to it religiously the whole time. That took discipline, a kind of discipline which could translate very neatly into studio work and promotional extravaganzas.

David didn't think there would be any trouble about parents. He reckoned they must have run away from a rainbow tribe convoy, the clothes they turned up in, plus their general weirdness was proof enough.

Adam said not, even in private. He had it that he was still on the run from the black hats of Grafton Park; they were breeding him, you see.

"Breeding you?" David asked tolerantly. The two of them were sitting backstage while the roadies set up the holorig, big crystal projection spheres arching overhead, linked together by thick braids of optical fibre. Even inert, it cast a beautiful prismatic corona; switched on it was glorious.

"Yes," Adam said. "They're interested in the children I can produce. So they brought Charlotte to me on my 15th birthday. She's an orphan, and she's got a high IQ. She's gorgeous, as well." He blushed. "That was supposed to make it easier."

"Yeah, I can imagine." Charlotte had breasts like a Penthouse Pet after the pixel artist had finished revamping with a mouse; but the rest of it... David recognized the reference, pure Dr Strangelove. After that it became a private game in his mind, seeing if he could identify which snippets of videos and books had gone into constructing the myth.

"She wasn't alone," Adam said in a scared whisper. "There were 40 girls waiting for me. I made 12 of them pregnant before we escaped with Graham."

David struggled to keep his face straight. "So how come you left? That harem arrangement sounds pretty close to heaven if you ask me."

"Because Charlotte and I are in love. And because

they would abuse what I am; she explained it to me, all they want me to do is make money for them. They can't think outside those terms. And she's right. There's so much I can achieve if I'm allowed to go free."

Such a serious little boy. But so imaginative.

Castlestorm was due for a two-week break over Christmas, after that they were going straight into a studio to record the next album. David had chosen Alsworth Grange, a manor house in Kent with accommodation for 20, a studio with a 100-track deck and a rehearsal hall. Isolated in 15 acres of its own parkland, it was almost groupie-proof. Milton Management owned it, and David had used a large chunk of the record company's advance to book them in for a six-month stretch.

"What are you going to do with Adam and Charlotte?" Maxine asked him in Newark's shabby airless greenroom. It was showdown time, and arranged perfectly. Maxine again, he guessed. Castlestorm were due on in five minutes, but they had all gathered round, riding a buzz of shop-steward militancy.

"Me? They're your strays, remember?"

"You can't hand them back to the military," she said firmly.

Military! "I wasn't planning to. Look, the social services can take care of them."

"No way!" Don bellowed. "Those Adolfs would have them back at Grafton in an hour. They're Government, man, they're part of it."

"What then?"

Don's anger burnt out as fast as it had flared. "How about letting them stay at Alsworth, just for Christmas? We'll be down straight after, we can sort something permanent out then."

"We'll pay for the rooms," Maxine volunteered.

David pursed his lips, and said: "Okay, sure." Then he walked away; leaving them in a bewildered huddle, wondering what kind of tabs he was dropping to flip moods so fast.

"They'll find us," Adam said bleakly after David made the offer to stay at the Grange. "Moving about, we're all right, but they'll pin us down if we stop."

Charlotte stood beside him, clutching his arm, giving him a forlorn look. Adam was visibly melting under it.

"Look," David said, all sweet reason. "If anybody comes, anybody at all from your past, I'll stall them. I'll throw writs and injunctions at them until you're legally old enough to make decisions for yourself. Listen, when terrorists grow up they become music-biz lawyers, nobody beats them in court. Ask Maxine. Besides, it's Christmas coming up, you don't want little Graham to spend his first Christmas in a hostel, now do you?"

Charlotte tugged insistently on Adam's sleeve.

"We haven't got any money," Adam said lamely. "We can't pay you."

"Think of it as an advance," David said, and smiled benignly.

Adam must have enjoyed Christmas at Alsworth after all. It was early March when David realized Charlotte was pregnant again. He had long since trained himself to watch for the vital signs, pregnancy could be a real dog turd on the path to fame.

The shine it put on her face was joyous. David

began to devote more of his time to her, taking her shopping, spoiling little Graham with presents. It wasn't as though he felt randy about her, not a young mother, more like enchanted. It was the same as having a daughter without all that tussle over telephones and boys and clothes.

Adam fitted in to Alsworth as if he'd been born to the nuclear stress of studio life. Chomping through Chinese takeaways in the early hours, sitting up with the band watching videos on the big wall screen, banging the tambourine in the studio.

Castlestorm's recording schedule hit new peaks. They cut five tracks in two and a half months, with another eight being squabbled over, re-written, rearranged. Even Maxine and Don were keeping their artistic-conflict screaming fits to a minimum.

Best of all, David coaxed the boy behind a mike. At first he got the distinct impression Adam was doing it just to humour him. But the boy's attitude shifted fast enough after the band, his real friends, switched from encouragement to hardline adulation.

Adam's voice was audio nectar; he could sing anything from ballads to glam punk, and mean it. Even the engineers were silent when he was recording. Now that was an omen David couldn't ignore.

He started to think about shunting Castlestorm off onto one of his vice-presidents so he could concentrate solely on Adam. With the right handling the boy become the new millennium's first macrostar. There was just the question of a contract.

"He'll rip you off," Maxine said when David called Adam into his office for a conference. That Castlestorm would come with him was inevitable, guarding their adopted soul-brother against the lord of darkness. "But they all do that," she grumbled. "And he's better than some. I'd say sign it."

"And I love you too," David told her, blowing a kiss.

Adam turned to Charlotte. She gave him a tender smile, and nodded.

So he signed. David felt like the man who bought Manhattan island for ten glass beads and a bottle of whisky, like Brian Epstein seeing the crowds waiting at JFK.

The trim blue handwriting just said: Adam, no surname; but the legal stormtroops said that was okay, it was intent which counted. David didn't press the point, he would make up a name and a history later.

And then, at the start of April, Charlotte wasn't pregnant any more. She just came downstairs one morning, the little bump under her T-shirt missing, her cheeks pale. She never said a word, never complained.

But it was Adam who shocked David. The miscarriage didn't even register with the boy, if anything he seemed brighter afterwards. Shock? Trauma? Explanations like that didn't seem likely. David began to wonder about the boy's background again, really wonder. What could immunize him from emotions like that?

He called the discreet doctor from Harley Street, the one whose phone number seemed to be branded into his soul, and asked her to come and take a look at yet another of his protégées. She gave Charlotte a check over, and pronounced her all right. Here's a pill, make sure she doesn't do anything strenuous for a month. I'll send the bill to your office as usual.

Not even the doctor cared.

So in the end it was only David who wept over gentle Charlotte's loss. Hiding away in his study, with his bottle of brandy, and a conscience he hadn't acknowledged for 15 years; thinking about Charlotte, alone in the night, flushing the foetus out between her legs in a rush of blood and horror and pain. An obscene way to end a life that had never begun. She was too young, too beautiful for all this teratoid ugliness. Locked away in a mansion full of well-meaning circus freaks and computer-brained ring masters. She deserved a life of her own; he wanted to let her go, pay her off and set her free. But she said she loved Adam; she believed it.

And he couldn't let Adam quit, not now. He just couldn't.

The music biz, he reflected, was made up of the most dismal collection of bastards this shoddy old planet had ever known.

Kirsten held her little summit in the house's conservatory; her father didn't use it much these days, not since she had sent off to Alsworth for the fruit kernels. The original Swiss-cheese plants and fuchsias had been uprooted, replaced by Adam's flora. They were beautiful plants to look at, with thick dark trunks, broad heart-shaped leaves and rubbery juice sacs dangling below most branches.

Kirsten squeezed a lemon teat, filling Joanne's glass.

"I say do it," Nicola urged belligerently.

"Your father being friends with Adam," Stephanie said. "Who'd have thought it?"

Kirsten handed Joanne the glass, and flopped down into her sponge chair. The bulging amorphous plant flowed beneath her, adapting to her shape. "I always knew he managed Castlestorm," she admitted. "I just never made the connection until yesterday. You know, he actually still owns Alsworth Grange. He told me."

"My God," Nicola squealed. "Do it, ask him!"

The grin on Kirsten's face wasn't quite as full as she would have liked. She glanced at the slim crystalline AV pillar in the corner of the conservatory. It was omni-directional, shooting a widescan image straight into her retinas. These days she more or less kept it spliced permanently into the feed from Mars.

A bright rainbow sparkle, and she was looking out over the Martian desert, Mare Erythraeum, showing delicate pink sky with a hint of yellow on the horizon. The rust-red ground was stippled by a billion jagged stones and hazed by an airborne seam of dust as fine as lake mist. Patches of oxygen-liberating lichen were mottling the ubiquitous stones, their dark green shading a sharp contrast to the planet's indigenous pastel colours. In the centre of the image was a tree; the layered branch structure reminiscent of a cedar, except here the leaves had been replaced by giant membrane sheets draped over entire branch forks. Around the base of the trunk the bark was sculpted into a frieze of human silhouettes. Some of them had protruded further out of the integument than others. Even though the camera was too far away for details, Kirsten knew whose face was etched on each figure.

The sight gave her a supreme thrill. Adam's domi-

nion was reaching out to claim the planets. It wasn't just Adam, of course, a surprising number of countries had been running genetic projects on similar lines to Grafton Park.

With Adam and his peers, and then their children, nestling in the heart of every nation on Earth, the revolution, the switch from mechanical to biological, became irreversible.

Doomed to succeed, her father said.

He had told her about his time, the perpetual squalor and the endless individual striving. Of every life being a 40-year struggle for survival. Of the sick and the dying. Of how they all wanted it to change, but could never bring themselves to believe the dream they shared was real.

"The bands didn't make the dream," he said. "They fed on the dream. And in the end they made us pay to hear it."

Thankfully it was over now, possessing only the dwindling menace of a nightmare at the break of day. Adam was remorselessly eviscerating the sickness of her father's culture with his new genetic order. And more than anything she wanted to be a part of that, to birth the children who would grow up amid such wonders — who would live in a world that was safe and kind and still had challenges. Adam's empire, all things to all people. Except those who remembered, she thought sombrely.

She turned away from the AV cylinder, determination crystallizing in her mind.

"I don't see why you're all so het up," Joanne complained. "I saw three more Eves on my way here this morning. Adam's sons will be along in a year or two anyway."

"Oh Joanne," Stephanie wailed. "She could have one of Adam's children. Why settle for second hand?"

"It won't make any difference to the DNA," Joanne said.

"We're not talking about DNA, we're talking about Adam. We're talking supreme kudos. Who else in backward Francet is going to have a child fathered by Adam himself? They'll crown her queen of the county after that."

"I'll do it," Kirsten said. "I'll ask father for an introduction."

Nicola whooped delightedly. "Atta girl! Hey, can we watch?"

Now it had found David, the past seemed intent on inflicting a psychopathic revenge, not so much poetic justice, more poetic vengeance.

There was Eve, deforming further every morning that he took Rusty out for a walk. Her dress had rotted away by the second day. The body it exposed had no sexual characteristics, no nipples, no navel, no vagina. The darkening skin had hardened, wrinkles deepening until it had become bark. Her entire torso was swelling rapidly now, legs amalgamating into a single stocky trunk to support it. How could Adam shape the walking wombs like her, then commit such sacrilege on each one?

Kirsten and her gaggle of friends were playing a guessing game over what Eve was going to birth. Judging by the size of the swelling, David thought it would be a cow. Adam had sequenced them with an extra womb-like organ, one which produced solid nodules

of flesh. Herds today grazed their pastures as always, excreting football-sized steaks all over the grass and buttercups. It was the same for sheep and pigs; he hadn't heard of chickens doing it yet, but that would be only a matter of time. Everything in Adam's kingdom was only a matter of time now.

Right at the beginning he had known what would happen, how powerful the new genetics would be, how dominant. He more than anyone. But he went ahead and had Kirsten anyway. He had never regretted that, not once.

Until today.

Now she knew what her father was, his trivial footnote in history, that evolutionary turmoil raging so remotely outside his house had suddenly swept in through all the locked doors and windows to become excruciatingly personal.

Kirsten had come into his study this morning, knocking timidly, bringing his cup of tea, smiling the way she always did when she wanted to melt his arctic heart. And asked the terrible question.

"You want an introduction to Adam? Why?"

"So I can have one of his children," she said. She grinned sheepishly, because it was so obvious and uncomplicated. And how could it possibly hurt anybody?

"What about Thomas?" he asked. Now there was someone who would make an excellent son-in-law, a lad he could take down to the pub for a swift jar before lunch. David had thought Kirsten and Thomas might even be lovers.

Her shoulders twitched in an embarrassed shrug. "Thomas is good company, but he's..."

"Like me? Unmodified, genuine." He couldn't help his bitterness from burning the words.

"Oh Daddy, why do you always try and hide from what's happening?"

Because with the dream denied him, he had nothing left but conformity. Family and children; leaving behind some living memorial. Because he could visualize what few chromosomes of his were left in her ovum, his sole heritage, swamped by Adam's superior sequences. Junked. You just couldn't punish a man harder than that.

She knelt down on the floor, touching his forearm. Cherub's face full of longing, the silent melancholic appeal. Daughters, he realized, had complete telepathic control over their foolish fathers.

They came for Adam on a dank foggy morning in May. Eight of them, packed into three Ford Nevadas that cruised smoothly out of the listless grey mist hugging Alsworth's long straight drive.

David came out to meet them, walking down the portico's steps as they pulled up outside. He couldn't see more than a hundred yards, the world comprised a crescent of trim lawn, hulking penumbra mirage of the elegant summer house, stark outline of horse chestnut trees standing sentry duty along the drive. Behind him came the steady patter of water dripping off the ivy.

He didn't have to ask. As soon as they stepped out of the cars, he knew. They reminded him of the Prime Minister's bodyguards; suit like a uniform, and eyes which could look inside your skull. After 15 years in the music biz of course he knew trouble when he saw

it, and it didn't come any worse than this. Adam wasn't paranoid. Adam hadn't been fantasizing about his past.

The first man stepped up to him and smiled politely. "Good morning, Mr Milton, I'm Officer Rutherford." A white and blue card was flashed at David. Rutherford didn't bother to say what kind of officer he was. "Is young Adam inside?"

"Yes," David said meekly.

"Excellent. Let's go in and see him, shall we? That boy is a human Chernobyl. The sooner he's back where he belongs, under proper supervision, the better for all of us." A courteous hand gestured at the front door.

David hated him, the calm assumption that no one would resist, the sheer righteousness. He wanted to ask what would happen to himself, to the band. But he didn't have the courage. Suppose Rutherford told him straight? Suppose...

"You won't hurt him, will you?" David asked.

Rutherford's regular smile tightened. "Certainly not. Used properly, young Adam will become a highly valuable resource."

"Resource? He's a human being, you bastard."

"Ah. But he's not, you see. Not quite. That's the whole point, isn't it?"

David shivered, seeing Adam's golden smile, golden body, golden mind, golden voice. Impossibly perfect.

Something moved out in the garden, right on the fringe of vision. There was a savage splintering sound of timber subjected to abnormal forces. Glass shattered. The summer house burst apart in a flameless explosion, long splinters of wood tumbling across the lawn. Three midnight-black shapes lurched out of the debris, creatures with a hide like newly-hewn coal, stretching out their limbs and tentacles.

David felt his grasp on reality fracturing. He had seen them before, a few months back, during the tour when they'd played the video of *Alien 5: The Home Planet*, on the coach's seatback screens. He'd laughed and gone, "yuck" along with all the others when the monsters began shredding butch space marines into tatters of gore. And now here they were again, bounding crab-like across the dew-soaked grass towards him, fast as a panther, tentacles lashing about like tormented pythons. And it wasn't a video. And it couldn't possibly be real.

Rutherford's face contorted with fear. "You fool!" he yelled. "You let him breed!" His panicked team tugged stumpy guns from their jackets, lining them up on the charging monsters. An erratic crisscross grid of needle-thin emerald targeting lasers punctured the air around David, eerily delicate, fluorescing the fog into solid threads of neon.

Two short gunbursts sounded, their roar shaking his sternum. Then the first monster reached the cars. It hit one of the security men head on. He just seemed to detonate into a cascade of scarlet offal.

David knew he was screaming. He couldn't hear it, not amid the chaos of semi-automatic fire, slashing lasers, dismembered bodies jetting blood, and a near-ultrasonic keening.

Then he was falling to his knees, vomit surging from his mouth. He curled up on the cool slabs,



wrapping his universe tight around him.

"Mr Milton. Please, Mr Milton. It's over."

David opened an eye to see Adam leaning over him. He jerked away in reflex. "What the hell are you?" The shout hurt his bruised vocal chords.

Adam was on the verge of tears. "Please, Mr Milton. I didn't want any of this."

The band were clustered together on the portico, trying to take in what had happened. David could hear sobbing, someone heaving their guts up. When he rolled over he saw the carnage; bodies, blood, scraps of pulpy flesh. Two of the monsters had been caught by the guns.

"They are real," he gasped. The surviving monster was standing beside one of the cars, motionless, waiting.

"Yes. I saw them on the video. Do you remember? They were so tough, nothing could beat them. And I knew Rutherford would come eventually. So I copied them."

"How?" David asked. Some part of him quailed at being told.

"It's what I am," Adam said. "That's what they spliced into me. I can control the nature of my own germ plasm. Ninety percent of human DNA, any DNA, is inactive; it's garbage, spacing. But it has all sorts of redundant traits locked away in the helix; the difference between us and any other living organism is only the thickness of a chromosome away."

"You mean you can bring the world's fossils back to life?"

"Yes, if they were needed. But I can also produce babies with flawless immunology systems, that won't ever get ill; I can make them tall, small, brilliant, stupid, black, white, oriental; I can make them super athletes, I can give them life spans of two centuries, I can give them gills to live under water, lungs that can breathe the Martian atmosphere. Once I learn how, there's nothing I can't produce; servitor animals, maybe even plants. Nothing. That's why Graften want me back."

"And that?" David gasped, waving at the monster. "Don't tell me that's in our ancestry."

"No. It's ordinary bone and muscle and blood, I just rearranged the structure, that's all."

"But where did it come from? Look at the size of it!"

"They grow very quickly after they hatch."

"Hatch?"

Charlotte walked up to Adam, and placed her arm round his shoulder, protective and defiant. "I grew the eggs for Adam," she said quietly.

"Oh, Jesus." David put his hands back over his face. There never had been a baby, a miscarriage. How she must love Adam to let him sire those abominations inside her womb, to nurture them with her own fluids.

"David, you have to stop Graften from taking Adam back," Maxine said.

When he looked up at her he saw the white trembling face of someone trying very hard to be brave.

"Don't you understand, David? Think what he can give to the world if he isn't restricted and exploited."

He glanced over at Adam and Charlotte as they clung together. He was terrified of Adam; but Adam was terrified of the whole world. A mortal god.

"Publicity," he said. "That's what you need. They

can't do anything to you in public." It also meant he didn't have to decide what to do with Adam, that would be down to lawyers, courts, committees of MPs, public opinion. Anybody and everybody except for him: the Pontius Pilate of the 21st century.

The press conference was his testimony. He worked every trick, pulled every favour accumulated in 15 years of backhanders. In the end he wound up with reporters from 43 countries, 19 television crews. And Adam's performance was like everything Adam did, immaculate. David stood on the side of the makeshift stage watching the mesmerized reporters, thinking the old thoughts of rebellion, knowing every dream of a different world was about to come true.

That evening he overheard Maxine asking Adam to come to bed and make her pregnant. She wanted a baby that wouldn't suffer illness, she said, who would live for centuries, who was smart and strong and beautiful. She even told him the eye colour she wanted: green. This was Maxine, who thought a matriarchy was the only true form of government. And Charlotte stood there all the while, smiling encouragement, because she loved Adam enough to share him with the whole world.

David saw the future then, a lucid prescience outshining any midnight dream image. The droves of women who would become incubators for Adam and his sons, flourishing for one brief generation as they birthed the new order, then left oh-so far behind by their own children. And no role for other men. None at all.

He packed a small suitcase, left the keys of Alsworth Grange with Charlotte, and drove his methane-powered BMW down the long drive, never looking back.

Adam read the letter Kirsten gave him, remembering the horror and the glory of that day over 20 years ago, the last time he had seen David Milton.

As letters went, it wasn't much. But it was pure David.

This is my daughter, Kirsten. I want you to listen to what she says. Then do exactly as she asks. And make it supreme. Remember, you are still under contract to me.

Adam often wished the gulf hadn't been so great, nor the shock so abrupt. David Milton would have made a wonderful friend, he felt. Tough and practical. He would have welcomed David's cynicism and advice down the long difficult years.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

Kirsten turned from the study window to face him, sucking bashfully on her lower lip. "A son."

"Of course. What kind?" Adam had heard so many bizarre requests over the decades, from supermen to monsters to reincarnations of historical figures, he didn't think anything could surprise him any more. But Kirsten managed it; after all she was David's daughter.

David had gone through all this once before. The heavy forced panting, the sweat, the straining, the shrill cries of pain. Nineteen years ago, watching his then wife give birth to Kirsten. Now it was Kirsten's turn.

Men weren't built for this, he thought, not sharing their daughter's suffering.

But she had insisted. So here he was in a room of polished stainless-steel fittings and white-tile walls, wearing a green surgical smock, and hoping to God he wouldn't faint.

No doubt Adam would incorporate subtle redesigns in his female offspring to eradicate all this pain and effort.

Kirsten gave one final savage yell, and her son was born. The midwife and a couple of nurses clustered round, mercifully sparing David the ordeal of total participation. Kirsten gripped his hand tight enough to squeeze the feeling out.

"Did you see it happen, Daddy? Did you?"

He dabbed a tissue over her forehead. "Yes, I saw."

"I wanted you here more than anything. I came from you, and he came from me. Do you understand now? The continuity? Without me, he wouldn't exist."

That means you do have a part in all this. You belong in Adam's empire, Daddy, you truly do. Please believe me. Please?"

The nurses finished cutting the umbilical chord. David's grandson began his first anguished wailing.

He brought Kirsten's hand up to his lips, and kissed her sweaty knuckles. "I do."

The baby was passed to Kirsten, his tiny white wings flapping wetly. David felt a hopelessly proud smile lift his mouth as she hugged the infant angel to her chest.

Peter F. Hamilton is the author of the sf novels *Mindstar Rising* (Pan, 1993) and *A Quantum Murder* (forthcoming from Pan in 1994). His short stories have appeared in *Fear*, *New Moon* and the anthologies *In Dreams* and *New Worlds*. The above is his first story for us. He lives in what used to be England's smallest county, Rutland (near Leicester).

Joshi on Anne Rice

Continued from page 50

that such a thing is destined to occur.

When *The Witching Hour* was published, coming hard on the heels of *The Mummy*, there began to develop the ominous idea that Anne Rice was already finished as a writer; that the curse of bestsellerdom – and the arrogant self-indulgence it very often brings – had descended upon her as it has descended upon Stephen King, Peter Straub and Clive Barker, and would prevent her from ever producing a work as vital and powerful as *Interview with the Vampire*. But *The Tale of the Body Thief* should restore at least some of our faith that Rice still has the power, skill and self-restraint to write vibrantly in the weird mode. Rice is not, and probably never will be, one of the great masters of weird fiction – she will never deserve to be ranked with Poe, Machen, Blackwood, Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson and Ramsey Campbell – but she has contributed some highly creditable novels to a field whose masterworks are still very few in number.

Notes

1. Kathy Mackay, "Anne Rice: Risks Fuel Success in Her World of Imagination," *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, 3 February 1980, p.3.

2. This is also the subject of S.P. Somtow's novel *Vampire Junction* (1984), but Rice is not likely to have read this obscure but brilliant work.

Editor's Note: As with his previous essays on Robert Aickman (MILLION no. 12) and Stephen King (MILLION no. 13), the above piece will form a chapter in S.T. Joshi's forthcoming critical study provisionally entitled *The Modern Weird Tale*.

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Island Rubrics

John Clute

This is going to be something of an experiment. Neither you nor I – if you're a normal reader of novels, and if I'm a normal untenured reviewer of non-academic books – are supposed to trouble our heads about the kind of publication I'm going to talk about for a while; and if the notion of looking at a variorum text of H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* seems eccentric, I'd suggest dodging down this column to the third gap, where a couple of the usual suspects – Herbert Lieberman's *Sandman*, *Sleep* and Lucius Shepard's *The Golden* – are rounded upon. We who remain at the top of this pile of words must now gird our loins: because we are about to enter a thicket. After we get through, there may be some fun in store.

We begin with the thicket of variorum itself. A variorum edition is a scholarly presentation of a chosen version (generally called the copy text) of a work (like *The Island of Doctor Moreau*), and is accompanied by an apparatus which lays out for the reader all significant variations from that copy text: changes found in cognate texts (like US and UK versions of the same book, for instance); revisions made to later releases of the chosen text; holograph changes made by the author (or someone else) to some copy of that text; the possibilities proliferate. The decision as to which version of the work to honour as copy text is usually a pretty simple one to make: in the absence of compelling reasons to the contrary, copy text should generally be that text which most fully represents its author's final thoughts about the first edition of the story in question.

Once chosen, that copy text will itself be edited, so that divergences from the author's manuscript (if it's available) are recorded, and copy-editing intrusions and/or typos made at the time of original publication are either noted or corrected. Finally, the editor presenting a variorum edition will almost certainly wish to elucidate (through numbered notes, or in appendices) various questions of historical context and interpretation which will help the community of scholars better understand the copy text. The critical apparatus of a full variorum text can therefore be a complicated affair, a thought refinery (the book we're about to glance at is certainly a bit of a jigsaw to decipher); but in the end it all

distills down to one thing. The copy text itself. If for some reason the wrong copy text is chosen, then we are for the dark.

Normal readers and reviewers are not supposed to worry about such matters. Rarely are any of us expected to take the trouble to compare texts of a modern novel – say the HarperCollins and Bantam versions of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars* (1992) – and note that they differ in many small particulars; and usually we're right not to bother. But we tend to look at reprints of classic texts – like the novels of H.G. Wells – with a similar, trusting assumption that what we are reading is what the author intended; and it is here that we begin to enter deep waters. Wells himself is a case in point, and I've been moaning for years (sometimes in print) that almost every one of his best-known books exists in a quagmire of conflicting versions, none of them remotely definitive, and that it's scandalous that nothing has been done about it by the tenured, globe-trotting, sabbatical pros of academe.

In 1977, Professor Frank D. McConnell took up the challenge and published through Oxford University Press a "critical edition" of *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*, though without specifying copy text for either novel, and without making much visible attempt to clean either of them up. Moreover, as David Y. Hughes demonstrated in a review which should be famous (*Science Fiction Studies* #12, pp.196-97), McConnell selected for his copy text of *The War of the Worlds* a 1951 Heinemann edition which had been bowdlerized for schools – but then obviously the man didn't select the text at all. Like too many scholars, he clearly grabbed the first copy lying on his desk and ate it, tartare. A few years later Professor Harry M. Geduld produced a "definitive" *Time Machine* through Indiana University Press which was better, but seriously deficient all the same. We still lacked any decent text of any scientific romance by the most important writer in the field. We come to 1993.

We come to *The Island of Doctor Moreau: A Variorum Text* (The University of Georgia Press, \$40), edited by Professor Robert M. Philmus of Concordia University in Montreal. Philmus was an Editorial Consultant

to *Science Fiction Studies* when Hughes's review was published, and subsequently edited the journal for 13 years. He has published four books on H.G. Wells. It is hard to think of a more qualified person to give us, at long last, a version of an H.G. Wells novel which could be trusted by scholars (or reviewers, or readers) needing a sound base to work from. Professor Philmus's edition is extraordinarily full. His apparatus and his appendices take up considerably more space than the text itself. Variations from seven versions of the text – including two copies variously modified by hand – are meticulously notated throughout. Manuscript deviations are separately recorded. Huge amounts of ancillary data are imparted.

But it looks very much as though Professor Philmus may have chosen the wrong copy text.

His problem lay in the fact that the 1896 UK first edition of *Moreau* (from Heinemann) was followed a month or so later by a US edition (from Stone & Kimball), and that these editions vary. While it might seem logical to choose the fuller UK edition, which was published by a firm already familiar with Wells's style, it might also be argued that the US edition, published later, might represent Wells's final thoughts on the text. In any case, Professor Philmus came upon no compelling reason to select one text in preference to the other; and (in his introduction) presented his decision to plump for the US version as essentially a question of taste. As the two texts differ not only in word choice and fullness, but are also punctuated according to differing protocols, this decision turns out (as it almost always does) to be vital, and will affect his readers' every response to the book. To demonstrate this, let us look at an innocuous passage, one without any complicated word-changes to complicate the issue, the beginning of chapter 2 of the book. Here is the passage in the 1896 Heinemann version:

The cabin in which I found myself was small, and rather untidy. A youngish man with flaxen hair, a bristly straw-coloured moustache, and a drooping nether lip was sitting and holding my wrist. For a minute we stared at one another without speaking. He had watery grey eyes, oddly void of expression.

Then just overhead came a sound like an iron bedstead being knocked about and the low angry growling of some large animal. At the same time the man spoke again.

He repeated his question: "How do you feel now?"

Here is the 1896 Stone & Kimball version, which Philmus settled on as copy text:

The cabin in which I found myself was small and rather untidy. A youngish man with flaxen hair, a bristly

straw-coloured moustache, and a drooping nether lip, was sitting and holding my wrist. For a minute we stared at each other without speaking. He had watery grey eyes, oddly void of expression. Then just overhead came a sound like an iron bedstead being knocked about, and the low angry growling of some large animal. At the same time the man spoke. He repeated his question, –

“How do you feel now?”

There are only two word differences in the two passages – “one another”, and “again” is dropped – but the Stone & Kimball differs in feel quite markedly from the Heinemann. To my eye – though arguably this is a consequence of my having read Wells exclusively in UK editions – the paragraphing and pointing of the Heinemann much more closely reflects Wells’s usual practice than does the Stone & Kimball. It has a forward thrust, a nervous edge to breaks and rhythms, that seems to me precisely Wellsian; while the Stone & Kimball reflects, for me, a copy-editor’s mandate to compress text – the US firm issued Moreau in a pocket-book format. To my eye, the US text throughout suffers from interventions of this sort; to my eye, the Heinemann text is throughout more like Wells, faster, more urgent, and generally more euphonious; and the additional sentences (which are scattered through the UK edition) seem perfectly legitimate last-minute Wellsian modifications to manuscript. If Philmus is to persuade me that Stone & Kimball is nevertheless the right copy text, then he must in fact argue pretty strenuously that there was no compelling reason to print the seemingly more eligible UK version. He must, in fact, compel assent to Stone & Kimball.

Let us see what he says.

Unexceptionably, Philmus excludes all other candidates (like the Atlantic Edition) for copy text, and concentrates on the two 1896 editions in arguing (on page xxxiii and following) for his final choice. These arguments, which are various, are ultimately founded on an assumption that there can be no way to establish or even to guess which of the two versions represents Wells’s final pre-publication thoughts on his text (obviously if Philmus knew which text represented Wells’s final edit, there could be no argument: for without a compelling reason to the contrary, the author’s latest version must really constitute copy text). Philmus suggests that maybe the Stone & Kimball was revised after the Heinemann, because the US edition has a subtitle (*A Possibility*) which Wells may have inserted in response to an early review of the UK edition (but the subtitle appears only on the title page, and title pages can be modified at the last moment, regardless of the date the text itself was edited; and date of release can easily

be determined, and very frequently is, by a firm’s desire to come into the market at a favourable time). In any case, Philmus doesn’t really think the US edition was edited after the UK, and tells us that “S & K’s other deviations from WH [including the six new sentences which appear only in WH] may, on the contrary, be the result of changes that Wells interpolated in the English edition’s galley once the American Moreau was out of his hands.”

This does seem highly likely, and indeed one wonders why Philmus is not persuaded of the case; a case which would make it extremely difficult – given Wells’s closeness to Heinemann at the time – to choose the US version as copy text.

Philmus’s answer appears in footnote 73, which occurs at the end of the sentence just quoted. The footnote reads: “Complicating this line of reasoning [that Wells sent a manuscript off to S & K in the States before editing the Heinemann version] is the fact that S & K was printed by John Wilson & Son at the Cambridge (England) University Press. We might also remember that transatlantic mail in the 1890s did not take much more time than it does now.”

Philmus argues, in other words, that since both versions were printed in the UK, no clear decision as to priority can be taken. (One might therefore wonder why he mentions the transatlantic mail at all, as the month a surface packet might take to reach the USA would, according to this argument, make no difference to Wells, as both printers were in England: But let this pass for the moment.)

We now slide into a real-life dialogue situation. I am sitting at my table, talking with Eric Korn, an antiquarian book dealer and Wells expert, about the Philmus edition, which I have come heartily to dislike. I tell Eric that I think Philmus took the wrong aesthetic choice in picking the US edition as copy text, though I recognized that no definitive choice by priority could be made, because both texts were printed in the UK

– That’s nonsense, says Eric.

– I know the S & K looks American, I say, but Philmus makes it clear that it was printed here in the UK.

Eric grabs my copy of S & K.

– Look at this, he says. The gatherings [ie the pages that comprise a sheet of paper folded to the size of the book] are numbered [ie in the form of a “signature” at the end of the first page of each gathering], not lettered.

– So?

– US printers almost always number their gatherings, and UK printers never do.

Never?

– Well, almost never.

I show Eric footnote 73.

– So what? Eric says. Man’s got the wrong Cambridge. John Wilson and Son was the printer for Harvard University Press.

– So it was printed in the States?

– Had to be, says Eric.

– In Cambridge Massachusetts, not Cambridge UK?

– Right.

– So it is far more likely, then, that the American edit precedes the British edit, because Wells would have had to get the manuscript to Massachusetts? Which would have taken maybe as long as a month [pace the second sentence of Philmus’s #73]? Which means that there was no compelling reason to select S & K over Heinemann? And every reason to select Heinemann over S & K?

– Right, says Eric.

So much for Philmus’s main reason for his inability to find any strong grounds for selecting copy text. There were in fact strong grounds for selecting Heinemann. The problem was, Professor Philmus wouldn’t see them. Insult is now added to injury. After claiming wrongly that the “more or less objective criteria” for selecting a text are all inconclusive, and making some pretty dubious statements about the aesthetic qualities of the competing texts, Philmus now goes on to state that he has therefore, in the end, chosen S & K “chiefly on the grounds that it is the version least frequently reprinted,” and it was here that my patience did, I think, finally snap a little. The main and perhaps only reason that the S & K text is significantly less common than the Heinemann text is that for the remaining half century of his life Wells himself used only the Heinemann text – as Philmus’s own apparatus amply demonstrates – whenever he wished to publish future editions of the book, some of them revised from Heinemann (but never from S & K). Did it never cross Philmus’s mind that just possibly Wells used the Heinemann text between 1896 and 1946 because he preferred it?

It gets worse. Perhaps because the S & K punctuation is pretty old-fashioned (much less easy on modern eyes than the Heinemann punctuation, which even Philmus grants [page xxxiv] is closer to Wells’s original intentions than S & K), our taste-haunted editor has decided to “silently [my italics] amend” most “instances of archaic punctuation,” though he claims he has noted all instances where differences in punctuation create nuances in the sense of the text which means that he has burdened himself with literally hundreds of judgment calls, and by this stage I was not really willing to trust my reading of the nuances of this seminal tale to Professor Philmus’s judgment. I was not

willing to read on without knowing what punctuation points were neither Wells's via Heinemann, nor Wells's via a 19th-century Yankee editor, but Philmus's own. It's anyone's guess, in other words, whose punctuation – and this is a variorum edition – Philmus might be using at any one point; his own recension of the two passages I quoted a while back contains examples of all three: Wells/Heinemann, Wells/S & K, and Philmus/Winging It; but not a single variation is noted in the apparatus.

One now begins to leaf through the shambles with a slightly jaundiced eye. Factual claims that one had earlier assumed were accurate now seem less secure. Like for instance Philmus's caption to the frontispiece, an illustration which (he claims) serves as the "frontispiece of the first English and American editions of Moreau," though on checking it is easy to determine that in fact only the superior UK edition has a frontispiece; the inferior S & K edition has none, nor do its reprints. That's Philmus's first sentence in the entire book. Or take the footnote on page 88 to the Note which Wells appended to the end of his text. Philmus states that this terminal Note appears in both US and UK editions. No, Professor Philmus. Only the UK edition prints the Note in full; the palpably subordinate US version is little more than half the length of the UK version, as it omits the important final sentence about vivisection.

On the other hand, the ugliness of the University of Georgia setting cannot be blamed on the editor. Moreau is a short novel, but Georgia has decided to print the text in a rebarbative, dense, narrow-margined format which occupies, even with footnotes on every page, a parsimonious 88 pages of text (as contrasted to Heinemann's 219 amply leaded pages, or S & K's 249 neat and tiny ones). The result is a text which is unnervingly difficult for anyone to consult, and impossible to read with pleasure. It is all the same the case that Professor Philmus may not be entirely cast down to find that his choices have been so thoroughly hidden from view.

Here we are again, back in the future. But no apologies. It was a long excursus into sabbatical-land, but the fact remains, in the end, that we're the ones who pay for this sort of thing. So we should keep in mind what we're getting from our beloved clerisy, we should know what sort of stuff is stifling our eyes.

There is a kind of dynaflow hum to the telling of Herbert Lieberman's *Sandman, Sleep* (St Martin's Press, \$22.95) that almost fools you into thinking you're in the clutches of something sapient. It is 2070, and on a mysterious island-specific references

are made to the island of Doctor Moreau – a strange lot of siblings festering like a nest of snakes in a vast and labyrinthine palace constructed by their seemingly unageing father, an industrial genius from the first half of the previous century who has been plumbing DNA and the acronym gang for one hell of a long time, assisted by the venial Dr Fabian, in a search for immortality. Turns out that the siblings – all of whom are a lot older than they look (or know), and who see Pa only once a year when he selects one of them to become a YearKing breeder for the repulsive Munchkins who inhabit the swampy forests that surround the castle – all have some sort of motive to kill their progenitor, and when indeed the old guy turns up kaput it is a matter of minutes before avuncular but not very convincingly Maigret-like Colonel Porphyry slips over from the mainland to conduct an investigation into the bizarre murder. Lots happens, and there's an enormous flashback which tells us nothing about genetic engineering that the dustwrapper copy hasn't already let slip. In the end, the murder turns out to have been a kind of suicide, the children lose their immortality juice, and Colonel Porphyry slips back to the mainland and into retirement. It is as smooth as a doze on a downbound train, but astonishingly lacking in fixative detail, any sense that the heavily allegorized future world of the book has any objective correlatives, in the author's or in his creations' imaginations, any grit of reality, beyond sandman dust.

But some passages welled up, strained the meniscus of the tale, nightmares yearning to chew through the fat somnolence of this world and be told, like a French conte cruel. These nightmares, most of them in a long sequence during which the narrator (a son) is trapped in Munchkinland, stick to the mind. It is too bad Sandman, Sleep did not, in the end, actually tell them.

Like a French conte cruel come true, like a dream the author actually tells, *The Golden* (Mark V. Ziesing, \$29.95 trade, \$65 ltd; Millennium [with minor varioriae] £14.99) by Lucius Shepard enters its *topos* and its topic and its topology with a fine fierce mythopoetic lunge of creative fire, and does not stop to breathe until we debouch into the final page, into a terminal sentence whose inflamed syntax carries us from the diseased fundament under Europe in the direction of Borneo, "toward the crimes and sacred central moments of a new Mystery and the beginning of a strange green time." So we are slingshot out.

We have been in what is ostensibly yet another vampire novel. But Shepard tells his story – or enacts his characters' corkscrew clamber into

epiphany and slingshot – with all the chill sensual stink of intellection of some 19th-century French oneirist: Villiers de L'Isle Adam perhaps; or Charles Nodier (if only Charles Nodier could write as well as he dreamed); or maybe somebody from a later time, maybe Genet.

It is around 1860. At Castle Banat, the vast residence of the Patriarch, the clans of the vampire hegemony gather to drink the blood of the Golden, a mortal being who has been bred to provide a vintage of unearthly potency; but she is murdered. The protagonist, Beheim, a recent vampire and former detective officer, is recruited to discover the murderer. With the aid of a prima vampire from another family named Alexandra – their eventual coupling is the most intensive, the most physically and metaphysically arousing portrayal of the act of sex I can remember reading – he begins to explore deeper and deeper into Castle Banat, which is explicitly modelled upon the architectural fantasies of Piranesi, creator of the *Carceri d'Invenzione* (1749); though peopled out of Gormenghast, spelunkers in the caverns of an island hollowed out of rock. There is a library from Borges. There is a bricolage of erudition out of Avram Davidson, caltraps of device, emerald and dust and wet.

Castle Banat is also – as it turns out – very much like the inside of the mind of the Patriarch; and as Beheim and Alexandra enter deeper into the entrails, metaphor becomes the thing itself, very terrifyingly, and the plot twists like guts, or rubrics. A senior vampire has discovered a potion which will enable him and his fellows to survive under the sun of day. At the same time, a debate is being waged about whether or not to emigrate eastwards, out of (it is to be presumed) the arid day of enlightenment, or science. Beheim makes use of the potion, and survives into daylight, which Shepard depicts with an absolutely extraordinary, revolted intensity: though also describing it as Golden. The passages which limn the sun, and the depiction of the death of another vampire under its stone jellyfish Fuseli glare, are not much like anything in written literature, though one does think of Tim Powers's hopping magi, and of the narrative rhythms of Stephen Spielberg on his Ark high.

In any case, Beheim and Alexandra escape. Like sentences of the dream, they wander into the east. Behind them, *The Golden* shuts like thunder.

(John Clute)

Send Her Victorious

Paul J. Nahas

Colin Greenland established himself as a major British sf writer with *Take Back Plenty*, a romp through the icons of space opera tempered by a knowingness and a deep caritas of what they represent. Riding confidently over the twin gulfs of nostalgia and sentiment, it was a triumphant exercise in refurbishing the lost futures of days past with the devices of contemporary sf. In his follow-up, *Harm's Way* (HarperCollins, £15.99), Greenland turns the trick again, using the same techniques to deliver a Scientific Romance set in a late Victorian age that never was, where the British Empire extends to the stars, and fully-rigged wooden ships sail through space on aether fluxes.

It is a simple yet original concept magnificently realized, and entirely free of self-conscious sarcasm. As in *Take Back Plenty*, the Solar System is the cosy place of writers imagined it to be until realism started creeping in around the end of the Golden Age, in the late '40s. Venus is steaming and verdant; Mars is criss-crossed with canals, and angels fly His vermillion skies; the asteroid belt is a teeming reef of rocks; there are aliens aplenty, with bizarre habits and broken English. While the settings and devices are those of a Scientific Romance, the plot is pure Victorian melodrama, told in a skilful homage to Dickens (of whom the opening paragraph is a lovingly crafted pastiche) and to Angela Carter, and in particular to her *Nights at the Circus*, which shares with *Harm's Way* a plot teeming with finely drawn eccentrics, eccentric details, and a plethora of unabashed coincidences.

As in *Take Back Plenty*, the heroine is set on unravelling a secret history on which the fate of worlds turns, but while in *Take Back Plenty* the secret history was that of Tabitha Jute's spaceship, here it is that of the heroine, Sophia Farthing. As her name indicates, she is at the beginning of the novel no more than an insignificant mote of small change in history's exchange, a widow's mite living with her widower father, who is night-watchman of one of the docks of High Haven, the spaceship yards orbiting between the Moon and Earth. Apart from a few necessary diversions, the story is her own, in her own voice, a voice both humble and strong-willed, innocent yet keen-eyed. While she is never the prime mover, Sophia Farthing is the still centre of the novel's centrifugal whirl: all revolves around her, and the resolution of the plot reveals just why.

After she meets an iron-jawed envoy who claims to have known her dead mother, Sophia decides to follow him and learn more, but ends up on the wrong ship and (eventually) London, the teeming grimy metropolis of Dickens rather than the burlesque of steampunk. Here she learns that her mother was a whore and her father is really her uncle. The search for her real father takes her to Mars, where an assassin sent to dispatch her (for her existence is an embarrassment to those in high places) instead falls in love and takes her to Jupiter for a final confrontation.

The charm of *Harm's Way* is not precisely in its plot, although it is far more carefully constructed than its many coincidences make it seem. Sophia Farthing is a very passive heroine, and all too often is put in peril by villains only to be rescued by the kindness of strangers – a wonderfully drawn theatrical grande dame; the face-changing assassin who falls in love with her for no other reason than her radiant goodness. Her passivity is true enough to the kind of melodrama Greenland is parodying, and she embodies a charming and winning endurance, but that she endures rather than actively learns (and learns to act) does weaken the final confrontation with the main villain.

But that's a small matter. For the novel's charm lies not in the unravelling of a secret history, but in its bold images of stately sailing ships moving through the void, and of a Victorian society in which sailors voyage upwards rather than outward. This romantic vision is depicted with a consistency that's not due to rationalizations – there are none – but in the telling details which bring the whole glorious contrary enterprise to vivid life. It is a precise recreation of a more innocent age of sf in which raw space may be survived with a helmet, an overcoat, and nitrox pills, made real with grime as well as glitz, with a host of fully realized ordinary and extraordinary people flocking through its pages, a wonderful book brought to you with all of love.

The setting of Richard Calder's first novel, *Dead Girls* (HarperCollins, £14.95), will be familiar to regular Interzone readers, for it is shared by three of his short stories ("Toxine," "Mosquito" and "The Lilim"). The eponymous dead girls are the aftermath of a plague which struck London, daughters of men who became infected with mutative nanotechnology while enjoying oral sex from Cartier automatons. As they reach puberty, these daughters of Lilith, the Lilim, are metamorphosed into mechanical metonyms of heterosexual male desire and also into something more than human, able to affect their

immediate world with powers derived from the quantum indeterminacy engines into which their intelligences have been rewritten.

The plot is simple, despite long diversions into flashback – including, fatally bisected, the whole of "The Lilim" as part of the back history – and a virtual reality. Briefly, Primavera, one of the Lilim, and her human lover, Ignatz Zwakh, have fled to Thailand from the prison camp of London, where the Human Front is systematically eradicating the Lilim, and have been scratching a living as an assassination team working for the pornocrat crimeland boss Madame Kito. Trying to escape again, they find that all along they have been part of an arrangement between Titania, queen of the Lilim, and an American government trying to re-establish itself as a world power, which now wants them out of the way.

All this is fast-moving but, with a confusing subplot about the origins of the plague eventually leading nowhere, it is propelled more by its own urgency than anything else. What grips is the richly evoked post decadent settings of plague-ridden England and hyper-capitalist Thailand, the tragic love affair between Primavera and Ignatz, who narrates the story, and the strong and uneasy metaphors of sex and death conjoined around the dead girls.

Thus, the Human Front stakes its victims and publishes photographs of the skewered lovelies with Page Three style captions; Primavera seduces her victims with psionic allure and the accoutrements of soft porn; Ignatz and Primavera play domination and submission games that consciously mimic the sexual politics of their milieu. They are corrupted and knowing lovers, evoking Never-Never Land as their own private paradise while in truth they are an inversion of Humbert Humbert and his nymphet, Lolita. Primavera is a combination of vamp and vampire, drawing blood from Ignatz and at the same time infecting him with narcotic saliva, rebuilt from ordinary teenage girl into a kind of doomed superheroine with a real vagina dentate. Their savage and sparky relationship is superbly drawn, a private world that is slowly unfolded to reveal the real tragedy at its centre – that like Romeo and Juliet they are, at heart, just schoolkids.

The uncompromising nakedness of the metaphors makes for a powerful commentary on male and female sexual politics. Almost too powerful, or so they would have us think, for HarperCollins, who slipped out *Dead Girls* in February this year (despite its 1992 copyright date) after publicly wringing its corporate hands about the political correctness of the (entirely appropriate) Hans Belmer painting used on the cover. Well, forget all that. *Dead Girls* is, quite simply, dead good.

The Sea's Furthest End (Aphelion, [Aust] \$12.95) by Damien Broderick is a pell-mell tapestry woven from three narrative threads. The first strand consists of the recollections of a nerdish Australian teenager, leading up to the encounter with an alien artefact brought back from Mars which put him in the coma where he now lies. The second, which the teenager appears to be dreaming, is a full-blooded space opera replete with galaxy-sundering ships engaged in space battles at Galactic Centre, turning on the struggle between a dictator and his son and heir, catalyzed by a more than human girl from a planet of geneshapers. And the third strand is a conversation between an ancient human and an omniscient alien in the black hole at the centre of the Galaxy, in which the first two are slowly woven together into a frameshattering payoff in which God, as in so much space opera, is creakily lowered onto the stage. Along the way, Broderick has some sharp things to say about sf's predilection for transcendent heroes, while warmly invoking, amongst other predecessors, the ghost of Cordwainer Smith in the mythic templates of his plot. The Sea's Furthest End might be a little difficult to find, but Broderick, not as well known as he should be, deserves your attention.

The Weird Colonial Boy (Gollancz, £15.99) by Paul Voermans is another Australian novel with a nerdish hero. This one becomes less nerdish and more like the classic idea of an Australian Bloke (a bronzed hulk fully able to kick sand in the faces of the entire cast of *Baywatch*) by falling through a gate opened by an exotic species of tropical fish into an alternate history where Australia is still a colonial prison and where, despite the deep changes on history (deepening with almost every page, yet never fully explained), he encounters alternate versions of everyone he knows from his own world. Pretty soon he's in trouble: he's whipped and dumped in prison, where he gets wisdom and muscles while avoiding buggery (although not circle jerking), then stages a breakout and gathers a gang of hangers-on, gets the girl and falls back into his own history in time for the Labour Party's 1978 victory.

All in all, a thin idea stretched beyond breaking point, its lively scatological wit and abundant sympathetic characterization failing to make up for lack of invention and the distasteful implication that prison may be a bloody awful place but at least it makes a man of you, Bruce. Voermans' first novel was a fresh rendering of an alien invasion, but this contemporary Fatal Shore doesn't contribute much to the recent plethora of alternate histories.

Neither does Will Baker's *Shadow Hunter* (Viking, £9.99) contribute much to the burgeoning eco-aware subgenre. In this version of the Revenge of Mother Nature, Gaia, abetted by Ginks, hybrid human-chimpanzees, wages guerrilla war on human technocracy. The Ginks are the descendants of an encounter between convict survivors of a nuclear holocaust and chimpanzees from a primate breeding centre: Baker blithely asserts that "the chimpanzees were of course capable of interbreeding." So much for Darwin, eh kids?

The results of this "obscene union" (Baker's words) are a hybrid capable of focusing Gaia's anger and directing other species against humanity. A neat tale about a boy kidnapped and transformed and his father's search for him is lost in convoluted plotting which is mostly concerned with technocrats bickering in offices, and there are some fine evocations of the Ginks' eco-aware society (although in keeping with Baker's hamfisted verisimilitude, there is absolutely no indication of how this society and its detailed mythology arose in a couple of generations). But *Shadow Hunter* is so drenched with the froth of soap-opera power-politicking that its message is washed away before it is delivered. Trees died for this in vain.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Lunatic Conviction

I wasn't going to settle down to this month's selection of fantasy by names new to me before reading two new offerings from Tanith Lee. She's one of the few writers who present a truly unconventional worldview with unflagging conviction. Apart from that, she's among the equally select band whose grammar, syntax, euphony, vocabulary and taste never have me reaching for the blue pencil.

For *Elephantasm* (Headline, £15.99), as for *Heart Beast*, she has created a hyper-Victorian world of scabrous slums, imperial splendours, raucous music halls and men who are all after just one thing. The surrounding countryside affords a forcing-ground for dark superstitions, privacy for dark deeds, and unlimited scope for the abuse of feudal power; by way of symbolism, wolves survive in the remoter thickets. Nowhere else could furnish so much of the excitement necessary to the typical Lee heroine—a vulnerable young girl of fragile beauty, desperate courage, fatalistic temperament and a pronounced masochistic streak.

Such a one is Annie Ember, street-wise, virginal, 16-year-old sempstress, sister to Rose, a reluctant whore who has seen better days, and who, in a moment of redemptive frenzy, gruesomely slays the husband who has put her on the streets. For this she hangs, leaving Annie alone to seek service as a scullery maid with Sir Hampton Smolte, a parvenu who has done well out of the Raj, and whose love-hate for India has caused him to erect in Kent a facsimile rajah's palace for his own use. The many eccentricities of the Smolte family and retainers are described in loving detail, so that for a while the action flags; the story seems set to degenerate into a commonplace gothic bodice-ripper until Lee brings forward Rupert, Sir Hampton's heir. He has designs on Annie, but though he knows where it's at, his notions of how it should be done are so dangerous, distasteful and silly that he must have been at the Swinburne. His attentions leave Annie with lacerated flesh but hymen intact, whereupon, without so much as a muttered & rebours, Lee flashes back for 22 pages to show how Sir Hampton became as he is.

And so back and forth. Altogether, the construction could hardly be worse and there is hardly any story either — just a series of characterizations and scene-settings, punctuated with bizarre episodes, until the Elephantasm appears in a climax reminiscent of C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*. But such considerations carry little weight in the world of Tanith Lee, who is one of those writers whom one must approach on their own terms or not at all. The entire charm of her work depends on the vivid conviction which she brings to her unique vision, so that to condemn its assumptions as sheer lunacy is rather like complaining that Francis Bacon's pictures aren't pretty enough. But if you want 300 pages of top-quality obsessional guilt, schizophrenia and hysteria, exquisitely expressed and presented to the top of Headline's admirable production standards, look no further.

There's something ineluctably literary about imaginary cities. Malacia, Viriconium, Paradys; they all give the impression that their creators have read much the same books about the Florence of Lorenzo di Medici, the Vienna of Franz-Josef, Weimar Berlin and, most of all, the Paris of the belle époque.

Paradys, inevitably, has a French accent, but otherwise Tanith Lee's self-indulgent nostalgia for a syncretic universe differs from that of Aldiss or M John Harrison only in that a different self is being indulged. Lee has always been disdainful of normal human motivation, so the subtitle to the *Fourth Book of Paradys*, *The Book*

of the Mad (Overlook Press, \$19.95), might apply to her entire oeuvre.

On this occasion Lee has provided Paradys with two alternates called, to persecute her typesetter, Paradise and Paradis. Both are just as askew from our reality, but appear to be built on the same foundations. Clock Tower Hill is to be found in all three, for instance. Moreover, certain favoured individuals can travel from one to another, though not by means of any common trans-dimensional gate; they are connected by mazes of never-melting ice.

This being the book of the Mad, the principal characters from each alternate are so regarded, though two of them are (by our standards) reasonably sane. Leocadia, the artist from Paradis, is framed for murder and condemned as an homicidal maniac, while Hilde, the young girl from Paradys, conceives for an actor a crush which she is unlucky enough to consummate. Both wind up in their respective asylums, of which one perhaps represents the past of the other (or perhaps not; past is as fluid as future). The couple from Paradise, Smara and Felion, are full brother and sister yet refrain from incest, which is an oddity in their milieu; but since they practise serial murder with compulsive abandon, not as odd as all that.

In fact, the murders are the least convincing aspect of the book. With everyone slaying wholesale, one wonders how the population is sustained. By contrast, the descriptions of Hilde's life in the madhouse are full of authentic passion, not least because they are accurately based on 18th/19th-century practices. The "Concentration Camp Syndrome," whereby the power to brutalize exerts a temptation independent of any rational benefit or reward, has often been explored, but never better than here.

Unfortunately, the superiority of these passages further undermines the book's unity, which is shaky at best and ill served by the crudely insistent iterative symbol of a penguin. Nor is any real connection formed between the three sets of characters until the climax, which is sentimental and goes on too long. And yet... Tanith Lee's writing is simply too good to ignore. I could catalogue this book's faults all night, but would still have to admit I relished every word of it.

In a recent column I wrote about non-genre fantasy. This time it's the turn of the most stylized of all fantasy genres, Sword and Sorcery. The four books below illustrate how varied are the approaches which the genre permits; they also illustrate its current assumptions, in that all four are set in worlds which bear no stated relationship to our own; all belong to series, in two cases as the first; all contain some

element of love interest; and all have more-or-less catchpenny titles. They also illustrate how varied are the levels of talent on display, though none is of the very highest rank. S&S is popular, which suggests that some practitioners might do better in other fields. The first on offer has nothing obvious to do with literature at all.

There is hardly a word in **The Sorcerer's Appendix** by Andrew Harman (Legend, £3.99) which fails to grate. Harman's recipe for humour is to invent a large number of very stupid characters, and show them behaving in very stupid ways, time after time. He then explains to the reader what has transpired, repeating much of it. To ensure that no one misses the joke, he gives them names like Hogshead, Firkin, Merlot and Courgette. Side-splitting! Those who like this sort of thing will describe it as "wacky," "zany," "groovy" and "wise." Someone at Legend evidently believes there are plenty of them, as they have already commissioned a second book from Harman, who has given up his daytime job on the strength of it. *Quem deus vult perdere!* Someone else presumably thinks otherwise, as this is one of the most tackily designed and constructed paperbacks I've seen from a UK publisher. And before I pass on, Legend, you are specifically interdicted from including in any future blurb of praise for Andrew Harman: "Side-splitting!" — Chris Gilmore, Interzone.

On the other hand, for little over twice the price, Legend has brought out **Moonblood** by Philip G. Williamson in handsome C-format at £8.99. It is subtitled "Being the adventures as a young man of the wily Khimurian merchant-adventurer, Zan-Chassin sorcerer, spy and philanthropist, Ronbas Dinbig." Unusually for S&S it's written in first person, with an easy, good-humoured style that recalls Sprague de Camp and Angus Wells. Dinbig's sexual outlook strikes me as more suited to a man of middle years than a stripling, however; observing the budding beauty of 14-year-old Princess Moonblood (for this is her somewhat indelicate name), his principal emotion is sympathy for her situation rather than lust or regret — for that aspect he prefers casual adultery, reinforced with a little magic.

Such terms as "mature," "careful" and "dispassionate" rarely spring to mind in connection with an S&S hero, but such is Dinbig, and I liked him the better for it. Nor is the adventure into which he is coerced conceived on too lavish a scale; the newborn heir of an ageing petty king disappears, with a monstrous changeling left to mock him. Dinbig is on hand, and knows a little magic: will he help? He has no real option — there's a potentially

outraged husband, who could be tipped the wink at any time.

Because this is a mystery novel the magic must be downplayed while Dinbig interrogates the usual suspects, who all strive to give the appearance of honest souls without motive, method or opportunity. It makes for a quiet mood, and some longueurs. One notices that Williamson's prose is pedestrian in places, with a fondness for words like "jeopardize" and "utilize" (where "endanger" and "use" would serve better), and phrases like "in order that I might" (so as to) and "enlighten me as to his whereabouts" (tell me where he is). Altogether, this is more a book to beguile long train journeys than to re-inform your life, but I'd have been sorry to leave it on the train, even so.

If a writer has no real belief in what he is doing it's going to show, especially in a stylized genre like S&S which allows so many direct comparisons. On the other hand, the more passionate the belief, the greater the danger of losing his (or her) sense of proportion. This is what has happened to Janny Wurts with **The Curse of the Mistwraith** (HarperCollins, £15.99). It's a book of some pretension, written from many viewpoints and involving two princes who are exiled from their own world of Dascen Elur to Athera, which has come under the curse of the title. The overcast never lifts, the sun is half forgotten, agriculture has suffered accordingly and gloom pervades. Arithon has power over Shadow, Lysaer has power over Light, and only the two together can hope to lift the curse; good news, but they are the heirs of a bloodfeud stretching over centuries, making cooperation that much harder.

This has been very standard stuff since Poul Anderson's *The Broken Sword*, which means that it must stand or fall on the treatment. Janny Wurts's is so deadly serious that control of tone is vital. Often it fails, as when girl meets boy:

The prince possessed an elegance that went beyond his handsome face. His eyes were jewel-blue. He carried his well-knit frame with the dignity of a man perfectly schooled to listen, and with a pride unselfconscious as breathing.

"Lady, may I?" he asked in courtly courtesy; and hands tanned dark by alien suns reached out and slipped the shepherd's cloak from her shoulders.

The girl in question doesn't go straight into a nautch-dance, not wishing to collide with her author.

To be fair, it's not all like this — quite. But the overwhelming impression is of a book with no sense of humour, or of the ridiculous, or of occasion. When, as happens often, Wurts wishes to emphasize the dignity of a character

she invariably goes so far over the top as to make him seem like an impostor in his own clothes. The spell is broken, and interest flees — mine, at any rate; others are perhaps more susceptible to "courtly courtesy," including Stephen Donaldson and Anne McCaffrey who have contributed puffs to the dust-jacket. So don't say you haven't been warned.

All S&S has something of the traditional fairy tale about it, but **Days of Blood and Fire** by Katharine Kerr (HarperCollins, £15.99; Bantam, \$11.95) has rather more than most, what with elves, dwarves, witches, princesses and opening from the viewpoint of ten-year-old Jahdo, a ratcatcher's son from a humble village. To show how humble it is (and to remind us that these are the "Westlands"), he and his friends talk in a mixture of Somerset and stage Welsh, a mild blemish as it's a light mixture but avoidable nonetheless. Far worse are the tics, shared by many characters, of inopportune use of the words "like" and "suchlike" and declaring things to be "plain as plain." I think the intention is to convey a homely atmosphere, but it strikes a false note — like a belted earl trying to pass himself off as a Pearly King. This wouldn't matter if Kerr was a crap writer, but when she forgets her mannerisms she can write dialogue of passion and power. It's yet another example of a style deliberately marred to please the masses who never open a book, and I blame her editor.

But to the story. Jahdo is conscripted as amanuensis to Meer, a blind bard who is going on a quest. Unusually for such relationships, Meer is domineering, superstitious and emotionally self-indulgent, which makes for some interesting tension early on. Though the pair enjoy some low-key supernatural patronage from beautiful but only marginally engaged and not very godlike gods, mainly they're on their own, vulnerable people caught up in a war brewing on many levels.

As the situation escalates towards war Kerr's principal strength emerges. Her characters are carefully drawn and believable, with motives and weaknesses that make sense in terms of their perceptions. Jahdo, with his innocence and untried courage, contrasts well with Rhodry, a half-elven lord who has fallen on evil times and now serves as a mercenary. Likewise Carra, newly married at 16, pregnant with a very significant child but regretting the premature end of her own childhood, contrasts with Jill, a witch whom decades of magic have carried somewhat beyond the human, but who still feels a pang at meeting her old lover again. Kerr skilfully shifts viewpoint among them, both to illuminate the progress of her tale and to reinforce their reality, so that the pattern of the war emerges piece by piece. Like most

wars it's a dense situation which few participants understand; it also has its origins in the realm of discarnate souls, and is waged as much there as in the physical world. This makes for a complex but well balanced tale, whose dynamics recall Jenny Jones's three-decker *Flight over Fire*, though the milieu owes more to Tolkien. Indeed, much as I dislike comparing anything to *The Lord of the Rings* (it's what hack blurb-writers do when all else fails), I have to admit that on this occasion it's justified.

This is the first Westlands novel that I have encountered and is first of a "trilogy" (for which read "three-decker novel," as usual). As such it stands alone well enough, but six predecessors are listed. Since I presume they contain the youthful adventures of Jill and Rhodry, they should be worth looking out. Altogether, if she can just do something about the dialogue Katharine Kerr should become one of the top fantasists of her generation.

(Chris Gilmore)

Books Received

May 1993

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Banks, Iain. **Complicity**. Little, Brown, ISBN 0-316-90688-3, 313pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Non-sf novel by a leading sf writer, first edition; proof copy received.) 9th September 1993.

Barnes, John. **A Million Open Doors**. Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-082-4, 314pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 67.) 10th June 1993

Bova, Ben. **Empire Builders**. "The stunning sequel to *Privateers*." Tor, ISBN 0-312-85104-9, 383pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. **Jamie and Other Stories: The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley**. Introduction by the author. Academy Chicago [363 West Erie, 7th Floor, Chicago, IL 60610, USA], ISBN 0-89733-358-6, xi+393pp, hardcover, \$25. (Sffantasy collection, first published in the USA as *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley*, 1985; this edition contains one new story, "Jamie," and a new introduction.) Late entry: 1st April publication, received in May 1993.

Caldecott, Moyra. **The Winged Man**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3930-4, x+371pp, paperback, £5.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first edition; it's based on the British legend of Bladud, father of King Lear.) 10th June 1993.

Cherryh, C.J. **Hellburner**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-57291-9, 359pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA,

1992; sequel to *Heavy Time*; reviewed by Neil Jones in *Interzone* 66.) 3rd June 1993

Clarke, Arthur C. **The Hammer of God**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05616-9, 205pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; the American edition, listed from an advance proof copy in our issue 73, was scheduled for release by Bantam on 15th June 1993.) 10th June 1993.

Cooper, Louise. **Nemesis: Book One of Indigo**. Severn House, ISBN 0-7278-4463-6, 294pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1988; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 27; this is the first hardcover edition.) 24th June 1993.

Datlow, Ellen, and Terri Windling, eds. **The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Sixth Annual Collection**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-09421-3, lxxxix+534pp, hardcover, \$27.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first edition; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it contains a generous selection from 1992's crop of shorter fiction by such authors as Brian Aldiss, Margaret Atwood, Clive Barker, Scott Bradfield, John Brunner, Emma Bull, A.S. Byatt, Jack Cady, Charles de Lint, Harlan Ellison, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Gallagher, Ed Gorman, Joe Haldeman, M. John Harrison ("Anima," from *Interzone*), Garry Kilworth, Joyce Carol Oates, Nicholas Royle, Lucius Shepard, Robert Silverberg, Peter Straub, Lisa Tuttle, Gene Wolfe and Jane Yolen; recommended.) August 1993.

Feist, Raymond E. **The King's Buccaneer**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13329-5, x+465pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition published in the USA, 1992; reviewed by Mary Gentle in *Interzone* 68.) 7th June 1993.

Gibson, William. **Virtual Light**. Viking, ISBN 0-670-84081-5, 325pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; proof copy received; this is, as they say, an "eagerly awaited" item: the first new solo novel from Gibson in five years; John Clute will be reviewing it here.) 30th September 1993.

Grant, John. **The World**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-4041-8, 535pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1992; "John Grant" is a pseudonym of Paul Barnett.) 10th June 1993.

Haldeman, Joe. **Vietnam and Other Alien Worlds**. NESFA Press [Box 809, Framingham, MA 01701-0203, USA], ISBN 0-915368-52-8, xiii+223pp, hardcover, \$17. (Sf collection, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed slipcased edition, priced at \$30 [not seen]; published to coincide with Haldeman's guest-of-honourship at Boskone 30, the New England sf convention, this well-made volume contains four long stories, five essays and four "story poems.") Late entry: February publication, received in May 1993.

Hocke, Martin. **The Lost Domain**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224081-5, 383pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Animal fantasy novel, first edition; it's a follow-up to the author's first novel, *The Ancient Solitary Reign*, likewise about owls.) 24th June 1993.

John, Katherine. **Six Foot Under**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0729-1, 377pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition; a second novel by a new Welsh writer, following her *Without Trace*.) 3rd June 1993.

Kerr, Katharine. **A Time of War: Days of Blood and Fire**. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13782-7, 395pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; the American edition, listed in *Interzone* 74, is entitled *Days of Blood and Fire: A Novel of the Westlands* and is due to be

published on 16th August 1993.) 24th June 1993.

La Plante, Richard. *Mantis*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85531-1, 350pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the UK, 1992.) 5th May 1993.

Laymon, Richard. *Alarums*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0697-X, 309pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 3rd June 1993.

Laymon, Richard. *Out Are the Lights and Other Tales*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3581-3, 344pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror collection, first edition [?]; it consists of the title novella, which occupies more than two-thirds of the book and was possibly first published as a separate volume in 1982, and five short stories.) 3rd June 1993.

Leeson, Robert. *Danger Trail: The Zarnia Experiment, Phase 4*. Reed/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0843-3, 160pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first edition.) Late entry: April publication, received in May 1993.

Leeson, Robert. *Deadline: The Zarnia Experiment, Phase 3*. Reed/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0842-5, 144pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in 1992.) Late entry: April publication, received in May 1993.

Leeson, Robert. *Fire! The Zarnia Experiment, Phase 2*. Reed/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0841-7, 159pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published as *Fire on the Cloud* in 1991.) Late entry: April publication, received in May 1993.

Leeson, Robert. *Landing: The Zarnia Experiment, Phase 1*. Reed/Mammoth, ISBN 0-7497-0840-9, 144pp, paperback, £2.99. (Juvenile sf novel, first published as *Landing in Cloud Valley* in 1991.) Late entry: April publication, received in May 1993.

Moorcock, Michael. *Elric of Melnibone*. "The Tale of the Eternal Champion, Vol. 8." Orion/Millennium, ISBN 1-85798-037-9, 548pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy omnibus, first edition; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition priced at £10.99; it contains: *Elric of Melnibone* [1972], *The Fortress of the Pearl* [1989] and *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* [1976] plus the novellas "The Dreaming City" [1961], "While the Gods Laugh" [1962] and "The Singing Citadel" [1970], and a short preface by the author; there is what appears to be a new map plus some internal decorations by artist James Cawthorn; there is no contents page or clear indication by the publisher of revised status, although according to his preface Moorcock has made "some minor revisions" to the texts.) 10th June 1993.

Morris, Mark. *The Immaculate*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13971-8, 320pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1992.) 24th June 1993.

Park, Paul. *Coelestis*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224175-7, 254pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?].) 24th June 1993.

Rankin, Robert. *The Book of Ultimate Truths*. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40413-1, 272pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition; it's dedicated to the memory of singer Freddie Mercury.) 24th June 1993.

Rankin, Robert. *The Suburban Book of the Dead - Armageddon III: The Remake*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13923-8, 314pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1992; reviewed by Paul McAuley in *Interzone* 63; another reviewer, quoted on the cover, has labelled Rankin as "a sort of drinking man's H.G. Wells.") 24th June 1993.

Reichert, Mickey Zucker. *The Western Wizard*. "Volume Two of the fantasy epic *The Last of the Renshai*." Orion/Millen-

nium, ISBN 1-85798-108-1, 502pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1992.) June 1993?

Showalter, Elaine, ed. *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siecle*. Virago, ISBN 1-85381-590-X, 326pp, paperback, £6.99. (Short-story anthology, first edition; as with the various rival "Decadence" anthologies published by Dedalus, some of the contents of this book, by writers such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Vernon Lee, are tales of fantasy or horror.) 17th June 1993.

Simak, Clifford D. *Cemetery World*. "Masters of Science Fiction." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-985-5, 159pp, paperback, \$3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1973.) 15th June 1993.

Slusser, George, and Eric S. Rabkin, eds. *Fights of Fancy: Armed Conflict in Science Fiction and Fantasy*. University of Georgia Press, ISBN 0-8203-1533-8, vi+223pp, trade paperback, \$18. (Anthology of critical essays, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; contributors include Rosemarie Arbur, Martha A. Bartter, the late Reginald Bretnor, Peter Fitting, Joe Haldean, Brooks Landon, Gary Westfahl and others; sf authors dealt with in some detail range from H.G. Wells to Samuel R. Delany by way of M.J. Engh, etc; but it all seems very safe and genteel - it would have been appropriate in this context to see more specific in-depth coverage of the militaristic/"mercenary" school of sf represented by Jerry Pournelle, Roland Green, S.M. Stirling and so on [dirty work, perhaps, but someone has to do it]; also, we could have benefited from essays on "survivalist" fiction and technothrillers.) 6th May 1993.

Stableford, Brian, ed. *The Dedalus Book of Decadence (Moral Ruins)*. 2nd edition. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-01-1, 283pp, paperback, £7.99. (Short-story and verse anthology, first published in 1990; it contains an 83-page critical introduction by Stableford, plus texts by Baudelaire, Beardsley, de Gourmont, Dowson, Flecker, Vernon Lee, Rimbaud, Swinburne, Verlaine, Wilde and others; most of the material may be described as horror or fantasy; this reissue has "minor corrections"; recommended.) 27th May 1993.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil. *Keith Roberts: Master Craftsman - A Working Bibliography*. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 45." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-37-8, 9+33pp, paperbound, £2. (Sf author bibliography; first edition; recommended; earlier volumes in this useful small-press series of well-researched bibliographies have covered such authors as Brian Aldiss, Poul Anderson, Philip K. Dick, Philip José Farmer, Harry Harrison, Robert A. Heinlein, Frank Herbert, Fritz Leiber, Anne McCaffrey, Eric Frank Russell, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Vance and John Wyndham.) May 1993.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. *Bob Shaw: Artist at Ground Zero - A Working Bibliography*. 5th edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 14." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-38-6, 9+42pp, paperbound, £2. (Sf author bibliography; the first edition was published in 1984.) May 1993.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. *Edgar Pangborn: The Persistent Wonder - A Working Bibliography*. 4th edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 5." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-36-X, 9+17pp, paperbound, £1.50. (Sf author

bibliography; the first edition was published in 1982.) May 1993.

Stephensen-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson, Jr. *William Tenn: High Klass Talent - A Working Bibliography*. 4th edition. "Galactic Central Bibliographies for the Avid Reader Volume 7." Galactic Central Publications [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-39-4, 9+22pp, paperbound, £1.50. (Sf author bibliography; the first edition was published in 1982.) May 1993.

Stock, Gregory. *Metaman*. "Humans, Machines, and the Birth of a Global Superorganism." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02075-8, xxi+361pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Futurological speculation, first published in the USA [?], 1993; with its more than 100 pages of notes, and its tone of journalistic portentousness, this looks and feels just like an Alvin Toffler book.) 27th May 1993.

Straub, Peter. *The Throat*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-224178-1, 689pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition [?].) 24th June 1993.

Tarr, Judith. *Arrows of the Sun*. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85263-0, 510pp, hardcover, \$24.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; "returns to the magical world of her Avaryan Rising series.") September 1993.

Watson, Ian. *Lucky's Harvest: The First Book of MANA*. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-05423-9, 537pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received.) September 1993.

Wilson, F. Paul. *Nightworld*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-58175-6, 440pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1991; sequel to *Reborn* and *Reprisal*; according to a publisher's note inside, it also "reintroduces old friends and foes from *The Keep*, *The Tomb* and *The Touch*.") 10th June 1993.

Wilson, F. Paul. *The Tomb*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-39753-X, 365pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1984; Wilson's second horror novel, following *The Keep* [1981]; according to a list of his works on the flyleaf, both are now to be regarded as parts of "The Nightworld cycle.") 10th June 1993.

Zindell, David. *The Broken God: Book One of A Requiem for Homo Sapiens*. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-246-13775-4, 607pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 7th June 1993.

Novelizations, Spinoffs, Sequels by Other Hands, Shared Worlds, Sharecrops

We have begun a separate list for the above sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror (including non-fiction about shared worlds, etc). Elsewhere, such books often are tagged simply as "novelizations," but it seems to us that finer distinctions are called for. The new edition of *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Clute & Nicholls) uses the term "tie" (short for tie-in) to label most such works, but we find that too vague. For further comments on terminology, see David Pringle's "Of Sequels and Prequels - and Sequels by Other Hands" in MILLION no. 9; and watch out for our forthcoming feature on movie novelizations.

Asimov, Isaac, and Robert Silverberg. *Child of Time*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32579-5, 342pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1991; an expansion by Silverberg of Asimov's short story "The Ugly Little Boy," 1958.) 11th June 1993.

Asimov, Isaac, and Robert Silverberg. **The Positronic Man**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32811-5, 223pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1992; an expansion by Silverberg of Asimov's short story "The Bicentennial Man," 1976.) 11th June 1993.

Carter, Carmen. **The Devil's Heart**. "Star Trek: The Next Generation." Simon & Schuster/Pocket, ISBN 0-671-79325-X, 309pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf television-and-film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993; this is the American first edition of April 1993 with a British price sticker.) 27th May 1993.

Mitchell, V.E. **Windows on a Lost World**. "Star Trek 60." Titan, ISBN 1-85286-461-3, 275pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf television-and-

film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993 [?].) 24th June 1993.

Mortimore, Jim, and Andy Lane. **Lucifer Rising**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Illustrated by Lee Brimmicombe-Wood. Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20388-7, 346pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf television-series spinoff novel, first edition; the authors' names are given in reverse order on cover and spine; co-author Andrew Lane is a past contributor to MILLION magazine, and this is his first novel; it's the first of the "New Adventures" series to contain copious black-and-white drawings throughout.) 20th May 1993.

Okuda, Michael and Denise. **Star Trek**

Chronology: The History of the Future. "A complete year-by-year history of the Star Trek universe including almost 500 photos!" Simon & Schuster/Pocket, ISBN 0-671-79611-9, viii+184pp, trade paperback, £9.99. (Sf television-and-film shared-universe concordance, first published in the USA, 1993; Michael Okuda works as "scenic art supervisor" for the "Star Trek: The Next Generation" TV series; this is the American first edition of April 1993 with a British price sticker.) 27th May 1993.

Zahn, Timothy. **The Last Command: Star Wars, Volume 3**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-02518-0, 407pp, £9.99. (Sf film-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1993.) 24th June 1993.

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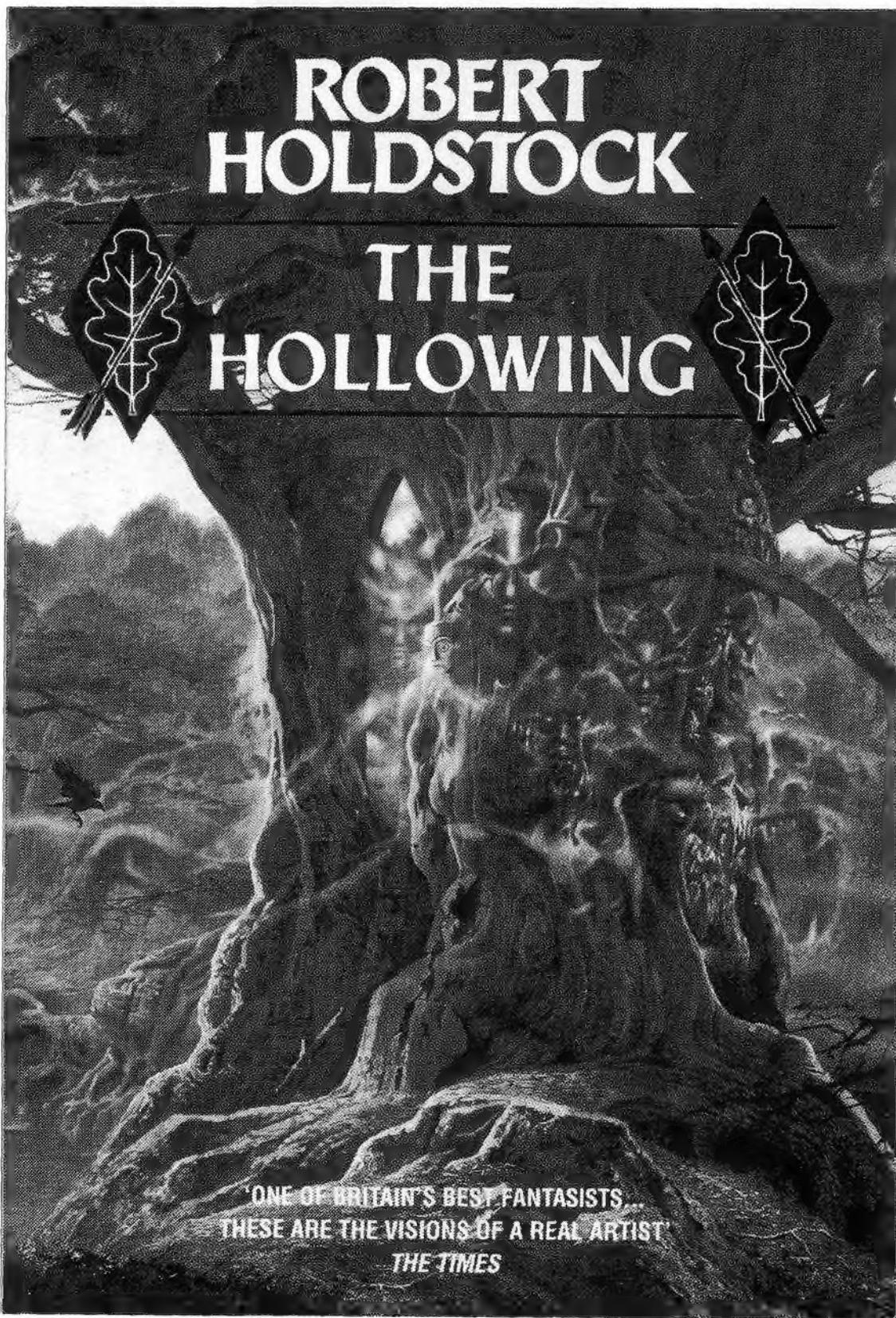
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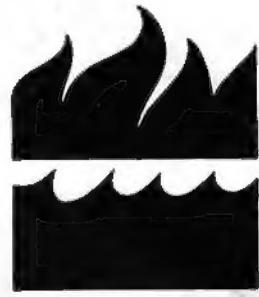
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